

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

LOST FOR LOVE



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A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "AURORA FLOYD"
ETC. ETC. ETC.,

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LOST FOR LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

"Où, sans doute, tout meurt ; ce monde est un grand rêve,
Et le peu de bonheur qui nous vient en chemin,
Nous n'avons pas plutôt ce roseau dans la main,
Que le vent nous l'enlève."

DR. OLLIVANT sat alone in his library and consulting-room, a spacious chamber built out at the back of his house in Wim-pole-street, after his day's work was ended—a long day and a heavy one; for at six-and-thirty years of age the doctor found himself possessed of a great practice—a practice that recompensed him largely for his devotion to science, but left little margin in his life for pleasure. It may indeed be doubted if Dr. Ollivant knew the meaning of that word "pleasure," except so far as it was accessible to him in dictionaries. His father had been a hard-working—the world added money-grubbing—country practitioner, and, at the earliest stage in which the infant brain is open to receive impressions, had striven to imbue his son's mind with a correct idea of life, contemplated always from his own particular point of view: that life was meant for hard work—that without hard work no man could expect to succeed—that worldly success was the supreme good to which the soul of man could aspire.

Cuthbert Ollivant learnt the lesson, but applied it after his own fashion. Had he possessed no higher brain than his father, he would most likely have restricted his notion of success—or, as his father called it, "getting on"—to the consolidation and improvement of his father's practice, the steady-going old-fashioned family-surgeon business, in the sleepy old town of Long Sutton, Devonshire. But the lad happened to

be endowed with a larger mind than had illumined the Ollivant family within the present century; and for him success meant originality—the fruition of new ideas, a step forward in the march of science; or, if not absolute invention, at least such an application of the wisdom of the past as should achieve some fresh good in the present.

For a youth with such yearnings, Long Sutton was not large enough. Samuel Ollivant well-nigh uprooted the scanty wisp of hair which encircled his bald crown when, after walking the hospitals and going through the usual curriculum, his son told him that he would return no more to the sleepy little Devonshire town, where his race had abided and thriven from generation to generation. His father might dispose of the good old family practice to whomsoever he would. He, Cuthbert, would remain in London—had indeed been already elected parish-doctor in a populous district by Bethnal-green. The pay was of the poorest, he wrote cheerfully, but the experience would be immense.

Mr. Ollivant groaned and gnashed his teeth, and told his wife that her son was an idiot; but nothing he could say to the benighted young man could shake his purpose. Cuthbert began his work in the purlieus of Bethnal-green at three-and-twenty years of age, and went on with it steadily till he was twenty-six; and, except at Christmas time, when he came to the home of his forefathers for a duty-visit, Long Sutton knew him no more. After three years' unflagging labour—there had never been such a parish-doctor within the memory of the oldest overseer—he went abroad, studied in France and Germany, pushed on to St. Petersburg, made himself familiar with every school of medicine, and was called back to England, a few months before his thirtieth birthday, to attend his father's deathbed.

“You’ve made a great mistake in life, Cuthbert,” said the old man, during the one brief hour in which he was able to talk rationally with his son. “You might have made this a splendid practice, if you had worked with me for the last seven years; as it is, the business has fallen off. I’ve been getting old; didn’t like to have a stranger about me, so wouldn’t take a partner. Filby and Jackson have undermined me in the place, Cuthbert; the practice isn’t what it was when you were a boy at school, by three hundred a year. But I leave you a comfortable little bit of money, in spite of everything. It’s your mother’s doing—there never was such a woman to save money.”

The “comfortable little bit of money” thus spoken of amounted to some thousands, quite enough to justify Cuthbert Ollivant in the step he took immediately after his father’s funeral. He sold the Long Sutton practice to Filby and

Jackson, who already had three-fourths of the town on their books, and by this purchase established a monopoly. He would have sold his father's household goods also, but here his mother interposed. The chairs and tables might be old-fashioned, cumbersome, inelegant; but they were the chairs and tables she had known all her married life.

"Two-and-thirty years, Cuthbert; think of that!"

"I do, mother, and for that very reason think we ought to begin our new life with new furniture."

"I am too old to begin a new life, dear, and I like the old things best." This with a tender glance at an ancient Spanish-mahogany sideboard that age had made almost as black as ebony. "They don't make such things now."

"I'm rather glad they don't," remarked her profane son. "It will cost more money to move the things than they are worth, I believe, mother; but if you like them, they shall be moved. I'd as soon sit upon one chair as another. I have no artistic tastes."

So the ancient sideboard, the secretaires, and bureaux, and four-post bedsteads of a bygone age—all pervaded by a certain grimness that stood for respectability—were conveyed from Long Sutton to the house which Cuthbert Ollivant had taken for himself in Wimpole-street, and being set up there, under Mrs. Ollivant's direction, made the London house almost as grim and dark and ancient-looking as the home of Cuthbert's infancy. Perhaps Wimpole-street itself is hardly the gayest or brightest of thoroughfares. Its length is to the stranger akin to despair, and it has been hardly dealt with as to width, whereby the shadow of over-the-way broods sullenly upon the fronts of the houses that turn their backs to the afternoon sun. But Wimpole-street is eminently respectable, fashionable even, or at any rate appertaining to the West-end; and Dr. Ollivant—he had taken the higher degree in Paris, and made haste now to obtain it in London—had chosen Wimpole-street as a fair base for his operations. He had no more to do with Bethnal-green, but he gave two hours of every morning—from eight till ten—to gratis patients. For the first year of his Wimpole-street life they were almost his only patients. Then little by little his fame spread; he had taken to himself a specialty during his continental travels, namely, the treatment of heart-disease—had written a little book upon this theme, and published the same in London and Paris. By the aid of this book he advertised himself into the notice of a good many idle people who fancied they had the heart-disease, and a few who were real sufferers. Rich old ladies and gentlemen, who lived alone and lived too well, came to him, liked his manner—a grave and somewhat cold reserve, which was yet courteous, and implied profound wisdom—and

made him their physician in ordinary. "Ollivant on Cardiac Diseases" and "Ollivant on Auscultation" became almost standard works. In a word, Cuthbert Ollivant had succeeded, and by the time five years had run off the lease of the house in Wimpole-street had made for himself a position which he deemed the stepping-stone to future distinction.

His mother lived with him now, as she had lived with him from the beginning, the careful mistress of his house, the intelligent companion of his brief intervals of leisure. Her character presented a curious mixture of the ultra-prosaic with the intellectual and imaginative. She would lay down her volume of Wordsworth or Shelley to order the dinner or give out a week's supply of grocery. She made her son's money go farther than perhaps any one else in the world could have made it go. She would not suffer a stale crust of bread or a basin of dripping to be wasted between January and December; yet she contrived to retain the respect of her servants, and was accounted a liberal mistress. Her son's simple dinners were ordered with a discretion and cooked with a nicety that could hardly have been exceeded at a West-end club. Every detail of the table was perfection, though no modern elegance, no phantom-like glass or rich-hued majolica, adorned the board. The old-fashioned heavily-cut decanters, the ponderous plate, sparkled and shone upon the snowy linen; and pleasantest of all was the mother's face—a feminine likeness of the son's—with deep earnest eyes, white teeth, and mobile mouth.

It was half-past nine o'clock, a November night, a wet night in a wet autumn, the rain beating heavily on the skylight above the doctor's head. He had dined, and spent his after-dinner hour with his mother, talking literature and politics, for she made it her business to be interested and well informed in everything that interested her son, and had come down to his own room to read—to read the last scientific book worth reading.

An old-fashioned silver teapot, a breakfast cup and saucer, stood on a Chippendale table at his elbow. The doctor smiled to himself as he poured out the tea—a grave, half-ironical smile.

"Old-bachelor ways already," he thought; "tea-drinking and midnight study. But, then, I never was a young man—in the common acceptation of the phrase."

A double knock at the hall-door caught his quick ear.

"A cabman's knock," he said, with a little discontented look, and a longing glance at his open book; "some dropper-in come for an evening's gossip—a nuisance, for I want to get at the bottom of this fellow's ideas."

"This fellow" was the author of the book—a formidable

volume of five hundred pages or so, half of which were still uncut.

Dr. Ollivant was not famous for his social instincts; but, as he was apt to remark to his mother, "a man can't go through the world without some people insisting upon knowing him;" and a few people had been pertinacious enough to establish themselves on familiar terms with the doctor, in spite of himself—self-elected friends. They were for the most part of his own profession. He asked them to dinner two or three times in the year, and suffered them to drop in now and then of an evening, but gave no active encouragement to their visits.

A card was brought him by his servant—an elderly man, who had been his father's factotum, and had accompanied the furniture from Long Sutton. Dr. Ollivant looked at it listlessly, then brightened with a flash of surprise.

"Mark Chamney!" he exclaimed, in a half-dreamy tone, "Mark Chamney!" Then hurriedly to the servant, "Show the gentleman in here directly."

He began to poke the fire furiously—a man's favourite form of hospitality, and then went to the door to receive his visitor.

Mr. Chamney had been his school-friend more than twenty years ago, when he was a lad at a west-country public school—his bosom-friend in the days when he had some kind of belief in friendship.

The unexpected visitor came out of the dim light of the hall into the clear white light of the doctor's study. A tall man, of the type known as lanky, with long loose limbs and a cadaverous countenance, redeemed from absolute ugliness by honest blue eyes—eyes that were mild and tender as a woman's.

This was Mark Chamney, the doctor's senior by four years, and his protector in the days gone by. Chamney had been a dunce and an athlete. Cuthbert, a fragile youth of fourteen, had construed Homer and Virgil for his friend, whose prompt interference had shielded the younger boy from the school bullies.

Cuthbert—himself in no manner deficient in pluck—had worshipped Mark as the very incarnation of force and courage—his Achilles, his Hector, his Ajax; and they had parted at the close of Mark's last term, swearing to be friends for life, and had never seen each other from that day until this.

Dr. Ollivant felt a faint pang of remorse at sight of the altered face—the same, but O, how changed!—remembering how little he had ever done to perpetuate this boyish friendship. But was not the other equally to blame? The two men clasped hands.

"I should have known you anywhere," said Mark.

Dr. Ollivant could hardly echo the declaration. He could only grasp his friend's hand a little harder, and say,—

"You are about the only man in the world I should be glad to see to-night, Chamney."

"And I am glad to hear you say as much, Ollivant, for I've come to claim the fulfilment of an old promise—a long-forgotten one, perhaps."

"No," said the other gravely, "not forgotten, if you mean our old vow of life-long friendship. I have gone through life without acquiring the knack of making many friends. I doubt if I have ever made one real one since the days when you used to take my part against the Goliaths of Hillersley Grammar-school."

This was said as heartily as it was in Cuthbert Ollivant to say anything—heartiness not being a characteristic of his manner.

"Odd, that we should never have knocked up against each other in all these years," continued the doctor after a brief interval of silence, during which Mr. Chamney had dropped into a chair, with a certain air of listlessness or fatigue, widely different from that muscular exuberance which Cuthbert remembered at Hillersley.

"Hardly so odd as it may appear at the first showing," answered Chamney. "Did you ever take any particular pains to look me up?"

"I don't believe I have had an idle day since I left Hillersley."

"That means No. Well, Ollivant, if you *had* looked for me, the result would have been pretty much the same; for I have spent the best part of the interval on a sheep-run in Queensland."

The doctor felt relieved of some portion of that remorse which had seemed to weigh upon his spirit since Mark Chamney's entrance.

"What took you to Queensland?" he asked, ringing the bell for the man-of-all-work, who seemed to have an intuitive knowledge of what was wanted from him, as he came immediately, furnished with case bottles and a decanter of sherry on an old-fashioned silver tray—one of the heirlooms of the house of Ollivant. Even the case bottles were heirlooms, heavier and clumsier than modern bottles.

"What took me to Queensland?" repeated the visitor, extending his long legs upon the doctor's hearth, and folding his gaunt arms. He was clothed from head to foot in a light gray stuff, which made him look his biggest. "A speculative temper, and an aversion to any mode of earning my living which was open to me at home. I was not a genius like you, Cuthbert. I always hated head-work, and was plucked ignominiously in every examination at Hillersley, as I daresay you remember. But I wasn't bad at figures, as long as I didn't see 'em upon

paper. I heard of men doing wonders out yonder in the sheep-line; so, when my father—a prosperous solicitor at Exeter—proposed making me his articled clerk, I saved myself the trouble of disputing the point, by running away. I needn't bore you with the details of my flight. I left Exeter with a few pounds in my pocket, and worked my way out to Australia, before the mast. I had rather a hard time of it for the first year or so, and made a nearer acquaintance with starvation than I cared about. But before the second year was over, I was manager for a man who had been lucky enough to get hold of one of the finest stations on the Darling Downs, extending upwards of ten miles in every direction. He held a squatter's lease from the government at a mere nominal rent, and on muster days I have stood at the gate and helped to count seventy thousand sheep as they went through. My employer made sixty thousand pounds in less than ten years, but contrived to drink himself to death in the same time. He had made me his partner a few years before he died—delirium tremens and business habits not being compatible—a fact of which he was sufficiently conscious to know that he couldn't get on without me. At the time he died sheep happened to be rather low; I had saved enough money, with assistance from the Australian banks, to buy his share of the station; and so began life afresh at thirty years of age, worth twenty thousand pounds after all debts were paid—went on from this pretty comfortably, taking the bad with the good, and kept hard at it for fifteen years more, when I took it into my head I ought to come back to England and see my daughter.”

“Your daughter!” exclaimed Dr. Ollivant. “Then you had married?”—as if it were the most unnatural thing a man could do.

“Yes,” answered the other with a profound sigh, “I married the dearest girl in the world. She had come out to Hobart Town as a governess; a solitary young creature, with hardly a friend in the world; and I met her there in one of my summer holiday trips, and loved her from the hour I first saw her. I suppose the kind of life I led upon the farm—standing up to my waist in water to see the sheep-washing, and galloping thirty miles before breakfast after strays—was calculated to make a man susceptible to that kind of influence. Anyhow, I fell over head and ears in love with Mary Grover, and wasn't easy in my mind till I'd asked her to be my wife. She hung back at first, but I only loved her the better for her shyness; and when I pressed her hard, she told me in her own pretty words, which were very different from mine, that she didn't want to marry me, because she didn't think she was good enough; her family were a bad lot; her grandfather had been a gentleman, but his

descendants had come down somehow; in short, she gave me to understand they were a set of out-and-out scamps, and that she had come to the Antipodes to get out of their way. This did not move me one jot, and I told her so. I wanted to marry her—not her family; and little by little I won her round. She owned that she didn't dislike me; that she liked me a little, because I was strong and brave, she said—dear soul, as if she could know anything about that!—and finally, that she would rather lead a solitary life with me up on the Downs than teach children French verbs and major scales in Hobart Town. After that I wasn't going to waste any more time; so we were married three weeks later, and I took my sweet young wife back to the farm. I had a good wooden house on the station, with a ten-foot verandah all round it, which had been built by Jack Ferguson, my late partner, and I thought it would do for us. But God only knows how it was—whether it was the climate or the lonely life that didn't suit her—my darling drooped and died only two years after our marriage, and just one year after she had given me a little daughter."

"You should have brought her home," said the doctor.

"The very thing I wished to do; but she wouldn't have it. She was unhappy even if I spoke of such a thing; she had some insuperable objection to returning to England, and I couldn't bear to vex her, and I didn't know the end was so near. She slipped away from me unawares—like a flower that you've transplanted overnight and find dead in the morning."

He got up and began to walk up and down the room, deeply moved by this agitating remembrance. Cuthbert watched him curiously. Then a wife was a thing that a man might really care for—not a hollow conventionality.

"I am very sorry for you, Mark," he said in a friendly tone, still wondering how so big a man could be so distressed by the loss of a woman. "But you have your daughter left, she must be a comfort to you." This was a mere mechanical attempt at consolation, Dr. Ollivant not having the faintest idea in what manner a daughter could be a comfort to any man.

"She's the only joy of my life," answered the other, with a rough energy which contrasted strangely with the doctor's grave tones—musical despite their gravity; for Dr. Ollivant's noble baritone voice was one of his richest gifts.

"And yet you could bring yourself to part with her?" said the doctor, with vague wonder. The whole business was out of his line—part and parcel of that world of the affections whereof he knew nothing, except so much as he had heard of it from his mother's favourite Wordsworth.

"Could I see her droop and die like her mother. That *might* have been climate, though strong men thrive yonder. I could

run no such risk with Flora—a pretty name, isn't it? her mother's choice; so I sent her home with a shepherd's wife, when she was two years old. The woman took her straight to my people at Exeter; but before she was seven, my mother died, and my father sent Flora to a boarding-school near London. He died soon after, and there was the little thing, friendless, and with strangers. She seemed happy, however, at least her letters told me so—dear little childish letters!—and she remained in the same care until I came home a year ago and took a house in London, and settled down with my little girl—she was seventeen last April—for the rest of my life." This with a faint sigh.

"And you have lived in London a year without trying to find me out until to-night?" said the doctor, with an injured air.

"You lived twenty years without making any attempt to find me," replied his friend. "Shall I tell you what brought me to you to-night, Cuthbert? It's hardly flattering to the ghost of our boyish friendship—if there's even as much as a ghost left of that!—but I daresay you've found out before now that human nature is selfish. It was a book you've written that induced me to come to you."

"A book of mine! I never wrote anything but medical pamphlets.

"Precisely. What's the name of your book? *On Cardiac Diseases*. That's it, I think. Ever so long before I left Queensland I had reason to suspect there was something not quite right here,"—touching his broad chest,—"*the gentlest hill winded me*. I had palpitation sometimes, at other times a dull heavy feeling, as if my heart didn't move at all; sleepless nights, languor, a dozen disagreeable symptoms. Finding I couldn't walk as I used to walk, I took it out of myself in hard riding; but this didn't mend matters. I began to think that I was nervous or fanciful, and fought hard, against my own sensations."

"You consulted no medical man?"

"The faculty doesn't abound among our sheepwalks. Besides, I shouldn't have liked to have myself overhauled by a stranger. I thought the voyage home would do me good, and it did. But the home life and this murky atmosphere have played the deuce with me; and, in a few words, I've a notion that I've come pretty near the end of my tether."

"You've had no doctor in England?"

"No. I suppose the life I led over the water makes a man something of a savage. I've a rooted antipathy to strangers. But as I was reading the *Times* the other day your name caught my eye at the top of a column. Ollivaut is not a common name. I remembered that your father was a doctor, and I thought I might as well come and see if the Dr. Ollivant of

Wimpole-street was the little fellow I used to save from a licking now and then at Hillersley."

"My dear old friend," said the doctor, stretching out his hand to his old schoolfellow with a warmth that was not common to him, "God grant that the instinct which brought you to me may be an instinct designed to accomplish your cure! The fancied heart-disease is, I daresay, only an effect of the natural depression of mind which your bereavement and your lonely life in Australia were calculated to engender. Change of air, change of scene, new pursuits——"

"Have done nothing for me," answered the other, with conviction.

Dr. Ollivant looked at his friend for the first time with the searching gaze of the physician. To the keen professional eye that haggard visage, lantern jaws, and faded eyes betokened a shattered constitution, if not organic disease.

"Come to me to-morrow morning," he said, in his soothing professional tone, "and I will make a careful examination. I daresay I shall find things a great deal better than you suppose."

"To-night is as good as to-morrow morning," answered Mr. Chamney, as coolly as if it were a mere business question that he wanted settled. "Why not to-night?"

"To-night, if you prefer it. Only I thought you might like to devote this evening to a little friendly talk about old times, and that you'd come up-stairs to the drawing-room and let me present you to my mother."

"I shall be very glad to know your mother, and to talk about old times. But I'd rather have that other question settled first."

"So be it then. Just take off your coat and waistcoat, like a good fellow. I'll lock the door, to make sure against interruption."

The doctor took a stethoscope out of a little drawer near at hand, and began his examination with that quiet professional air which has a certain soothing influence, the air of a man who only requires to ascertain what is wrong in the human machine in order to set it right straightway. His face grew graver as he sounded and listened, graver and more grave as the examination proceeded, till at the end of about ten minutes, which seemed longer to the patient, he lifted his head from Mark Chamney's broad chest with a faint sigh, and put down the stethoscope.

"You find I was right," said Mr. Chamney, without a break in his voice.

"I fear so."

"Come, why put it doubtfully like that? You know so."

"There is disease, I admit," answered the other cautiously; "I should do wrong to deny that. But that kind of disease is not always fatal. With care a man may live to a good old age, in spite of organic derangement as bad, perhaps worse, than yours. I have known a man so affected live to eighty, and die at last of bronchitis. You must take care of yourself, Chamney, that's all you have to do."

And then the doctor proceeded to describe the necessary regimen, a regimen chiefly of deprivation. The patient was to avoid this, not to do the other, and so on; no violent exercise, no excitement, no late hours.

"It's a poor dead-and-alive kind of existence," said Mr. Chamney, when the doctor had finished; "and I thought when I came home I should be able to enjoy myself a little; follow the hounds, charter a yacht, and take my little girl about the world—see life, in short. But this puts an end to all those notions. If it were not for Flora's sake I think I'd sooner chance it, and get as much as I can out of life while it lasts. But I haven't a friend in the world that I can count upon for my darling when I'm gone."

"You may count upon me," said Dr. Ollivant, "and upon my mother into the bargain."

"Do you know I had some idea of that when I came to you to-night, Cuthbert? If he's my Ollivant, and as good a fellow as he promised to be, he might be a friend for my little girl when I'm gone, I said to myself. And your mother is still living, is she? That's comfortable."

"Yes, and likely to live for many years, thank God," answered the doctor. "You must bring your daughter here to-morrow, Mark. I'm a busy man, as you may suppose; but my mother has ample leisure for friendship."

"I'll bring her. By the bye, there was one thing you did not tell me just now; but it hardly needed telling. With disease of that kind a man would be liable to die at any moment, wouldn't he?"

"Why—yes—in such cases there is always the possibility of sudden death."

CHAPTER II.

"Eyes of some men travel far
 For the finding of a star;
 Up and down the heavens they go,
 Men that keep a mighty rout!
 I'm as great as they, I trow,
 Since the day I found thee out,
 Little Flower!"

MR. CHAMNEY brought his daughter to see Mrs. Ollivant next day, at an hour when the doctor was absent on his daily rounds; but the lady had been fully prepared for the visit, and received her son's friend, and her son's friend's only child, as it were with open arms. She was full of talk about her visitors when Cuthbert came in to dinner at seven o'clock.

"They stayed to luncheon, and were with me more than two hours. I never saw a sweeter girl than Miss Chamney, or Flora, as both she and her father insisted I should call her."

"Pretty?" asked the doctor rather listlessly, with a man's usual question.

"I hardly know whether you would call her absolutely pretty. Her features would not bear being measured by line and rule; but there is a sweetness, a freshness, a youthful innocence about her that are more winning than beauty. To my mind she is the very incarnation of Wordsworth's Lucy."

Dr. Ollivant shrugged his shoulders.

"I never had an exalted opinion of Wordsworth's Lucy," he said; "a girl who was very well beside the banks of Dove, but would not have been noticeable elsewhere. I like beauty to be brilliant, flashing, something that inspires admiration and awe, like a tropical thunderstorm."

"Then you will not admire Miss Chamney. But she is a fascinating little thing, for all that."

"Little!" exclaimed the doctor contemptuously, "a mere stump of a woman, I suppose, like a lead-pencil cut down."

"No, she is rather tall than otherwise, but very slim. The most girlish figure——"

"All angles," muttered the doctor.

"And with a languid kind of grace, like a flower with a slender stem—a narcissus, for instance."

"Wants tone, I daresay," said the doctor. "Well, mother, I can't say that your description inspires me with any ardent desire to make the young lady's acquaintance. However, if you are satisfied that is the grand point; for you will be a much

more valuable friend to her than ever I can be. And she will have need of friends when poor Chamney is gone."

"He looks very ill, Cuthbert. Do you think him in actual danger?"

"I give him a twelvemonth," answered the doctor.

"Poor fellow! And the poor girl; it is so much worse for her. She seems so fond of him. I never saw such affection between father and daughter."

"Indeed!" said the doctor, eating his dinner with his usual calmness. He was not by any means heartbroken because the friend of his boyhood had come back to him with the seal of death upon his herculean frame. He was sorry with a temperate sorrow, thought the situation of father and daughter touching, but was accustomed to the tranquil contemplation of touching scenes. And he was prepared to befriend the orphan to the best of his power when her day of bereavement should come, to defend her as her father had defended him when he was a little lonely lad at Hillersley Grammar-school.

He waited for his first leisure day to go and call upon his friend, half in friendship, half professionally; but he meant to take neither fee nor reward from his old schoolfellow. Mr. Chamney had hired for himself a large house in Fitzroy-square, hardly conscious that it was not at the fashionable end of London. It was a broad airy place, and one square seemed to Mark very much like another. It could matter very little to the resident, when his curtains were drawn and his lamps lighted, whether the square were called Fitzroy or Belgrave.

The house had been built on a grander scale than most of the surrounding mansions; the hall was spacious, paved with black and white marble, the staircase wide, the rooms large and lofty. Black marble pillars sustained the dining-room ceiling, the mantelpieces were elaborately carved. It was a house which, with appropriate furniture, might have been made very handsome; but Mr. Chamney had furnished it sparsely with the mere necessities of existence, as if it had been a lodge in the wilderness. And he had bought his goods and chattels second-hand, selecting them haphazard at various brokers' shops, as he roamed the lighted streets after nightfall; now a huge side-board, now a table, now a dozen or so of chairs, or a set of dark, gloomy-looking window-hangings.

To his daughter, who came direct from the bare benches and deal tables of a boarding-school, the house and its appointments appeared splendid; and then the glory of having a house of her own! She told her father that there was something wanting in the drawing-room—it had an empty look compared with Miss Mayduke's drawing-room at Notting-hill. But that sacred chamber was beautified and adorned with the water-coloured

landscapes, Berlin-wool chair-covers, wax-fruit and decalcomanie of Miss Mayduke's young ladies, and had only achieved its present perfection in the progress of years. No drawing-room could burst Minerva-like into existence from the brain of an upholsterer.

"I must work you some chair-covers, papa," said Flora, and immediately bought several pounds of Berlin wool and a dozen yards of canvas. The chair-covers progressed at the rate of a hundred stitches or so per day, and in the meantime the Fitzroy-square drawing-room presented a desert waste of second-hand Turkey carpet, broken by distant islets in the shape of chairs and tables, all alike old-fashioned and irrelevant; a ponderous mahogany loo-table, four ancient ebony chairs with carved backs, six rosewood ditto inlaid with brass, a modern sofa or two, an office-table in the back drawing-room, in which apartment Mr. Chamney wrote his letters and read his newspaper. One spot of brightness redeemed the barren waste; in the centre window of the front drawing-room Miss Chamney had established an aviary,—half a dozen canaries in a big cage, and an Australian parrot in a circular temple of polished brass, dependant from the ceiling. The canaries did not sing much. It seemed as if the atmosphere of Fitzroy-square were not conducive to melody, for the birds had been warranted vocal when Miss Chamney bought them. But they fluttered and chirped in a cheerful manner, and sometimes even essayed a feeble warbling. The Australian stranger made a noise like the creaking of a door, which it repeated at intervals throughout the day, to its own evident satisfaction, as if it found therein an adequate expression of its feelings. The noise was hideous, but the bird was handsome, and that, Miss Chamney said, made amends; one could not expect everything from a bird.

She was standing by the big cage administering to the canaries when Cuthbert Ollivant first saw her. Her father was out when he called, so he had asked to see the young lady herself, unwilling to waste his drive to the regions of Fitzroy—quite out of his beat, which lay Mayfair way, among narrow streets of small houses, where the fanciful old maiden ladies and the obese old bachelors over-ate and over-drunk themselves. He had come up-stairs repeating the poet's lines about the maiden by the banks of Dove, smiling to himself at his mother's sentimentality, being himself in no way given to sentiment. The maid-servant opened the drawing-room door for him, and he went in unannounced, and saw her, Flora Chamney, for the first time, bending down to minister to a languishing canary.

"My mother was right after all," he said to himself, making up his mind, after his manner, at the first glance. "She is the sweetest girl I ever saw in my life."

"Sweet" was an adjective which people applied involuntarily to Flora Chamney. A small oval face, with large gray eyes, dark lashes, dark brows finely pencilled, darkest brown hair which rippled naturally upon the ivory forehead, a long slender throat, a figure slim almost to a fault, perfect hands and feet—in short, a delicately-finished picture rather than a striking one. A gray merino gown, a narrow linen collar, a blue ribbon tied loosely round the throat, were all the aid the picture took from dress; but there was a grace and sweetness about the whole which reminded Cuthbert Ollivant of a Greuse he had once seen sold at Christic and Manson's for eleven hundred pounds sterling—a kit-cat figure of a girl caressing a dove.

He found no difficulty in introducing himself. Flora gave him her hand with a frank smile.

"You can be only one person in the world," she said; "for we have no other friends. You must be Dr. Ollivant."

"Yes I am Dr. Ollivant. I am very glad you have learned to think of me as a friend."

"You wouldn't wonder at that if you heard papa talk of you. He is never tired of telling me what a good little fellow you were at Hillersley Grammar-school; and such a prodigy of leaning! If he had not said so much of your affection for him, I should have been rather inclined to feel afraid of you."

"Afraid of me! But why?" he asked, looking at her with a half-wondering admiration, and thinking that if he had married early in life, he too might have had a daughter like this. But then all daughters were not like this.

"Because you are so clever. At Miss Mayduke's"—taking it for granted that he must know all about Miss Mayduke—"I was always afraid of Miss Kilso, who spent her whole existence at the top of the class, and knew the precise date of every event that has ever happened since the Flood, and could do the differential what's-its-name, and hyperboluses and things, and took the first prize every half!"

"Then you don't like clever people?" said the doctor, smiling gently at the hyperboluses.

"I like them very much, when they are nice."

"Musical, for instance, or artistic?" he suggested, with a consciousness that he was neither of those things.

"Musical people are darlings! and I like artists. There are plenty in this neighbourhood, but we don't know them. There is a young man who lives three doors off, who ought to be as clever as Raffaele; at least, he has hair of the same colour as Raffaele's, and a Grecian nose."

"Science, I conclude, is less interesting to you?"

Miss Chamney made a wry face, as at the idea of something nasty.

"That means steam-engines and cotton-looms and things, doesn't it?" she asked, in her winning childish way, which made even her foolish speeches pleasant to hear.

"It means a good deal more than steam-engines sometimes. But one can hardly expect a young lady to be interested in it, any more than one can expect the flowers to know their own Latin names, or be learned in botany. You are fond of birds, I see."

"I try to make companions of them," she answered, "when papa is out. But I find it rather uphill work. They put their heads on one side and chirp when I talk to them, but we don't get beyond that. I really think the parrot has the most intellect, though his note is not musical."

The Australian, which had creaked intermittently throughout the conversation, creaked his loudest at this, as if in approval.

"I have given them the names of my favourite heroes," said Flora, looking at her canaries, "but I am afraid they are not very sure of their identity. That little fat one with the topknot is the Vicar of Wakefield; the one with a black wing is Hamlet; that little perky bird is David Copperfield; that bright yellow one is the Prince who found the Sleeping Beauty in the wood. I don't think he had any name in the story, had he?" she asked, appealing to the doctor, as if his recollections of nursery lore were of the freshest, "so I have called him Prince Lovely. The others are all fairy-tale princes."

"And have you no one besides your birds when your father is away?"

"No one. Papa's old friends—people he knew when he was a boy, that is to say—are all Devonshire people, and he says he doesn't care about hunting them up, not having been particularly fond of them in his boyhood. There are my old school-fellows; and papa told me if I wanted any companions I could have them. But when I went to see Miss Mayduke six months ago, all my favourites had left, and I hadn't the courage to go to their own homes in search of them. I should have had to see their papas and mammas, and—I daresay it's very foolish, but I have such a horror of strangers."

"Yet you hardly seemed to be horrified by me when I came in just now unannounced."

"O, that's quite different; papa has talked so much about you, and your mother was so kind to me the other day, you seem like an old friend."

"I hope I may never seem any less."

"And it is such a comfort to me to think that you are a doctor, and can take care of papa's health. He has not been very well lately. But you will keep him well, won't you?"

"I will do all that science can do to keep him well," answered the doctor gravely.

"Can science do that? Then I shall love science with all my heart. How stupid of me to forget just now that medicine is a science! And I have always thought medicine one of the grandest things in the world."

"Really?"

"What can be grander than the art of saving people's lives?—I reverence a great physician."

The doctor was curiously touched by this avowal—sweet flattery from those childish lips.

"It would have been worth my while to undergo all the pains and penalties of marriage if I could have had such a daughter," he thought.

The short winter's day—one of the first days in December—was closing. The fire had burned low, neglected by Flora in her devotion to the canaries; the lamplight from below flashed here and there upon the bare walls; the room looked big and dark and empty—a gloomy home for so fair a creature.

"I should have made her surroundings ever so much brighter if she had been my daughter," thought the doctor.

"You must find life rather dreary in this big house, when your father is away?" he said.

"No," she answered, with a smile that brightened all her face in the twilight; "I have never known what it is to be dull. First and foremost, I am so happy in the thought that papa has come back to me for ever."

"Unstable happiness," thought the doctor. "Brief for ever."

"And then, even when papa is out—though I am always sorry to lose him even for so short a time—I am able to amuse myself. I have a piano in my room up-stairs, and my paint-box."

"You paint, then?" asked the doctor, himself the most unaccomplished of men, and wondering how many accomplishments might go to the sum total of an educated young woman.

"I spoil a good deal of paper; but it's so nice being near Rathbone-place; one can always get more, and moist colours in little tubes that squirt out. It's enchantment to work with them."

"I should like to see some of your paintings."

"I shall be very pleased to show you the first I finish," answered Flora doubtfully; "but they don't very often come to that. They look beautiful at first, and I feel I really am getting on; and then somehow they go wrong, and after they've once taken the turn, the harder I work at them the worse they go."

"Landscapes or figures?"

"O, either. I've been doing the human figure lately—a nymph at a fountain—in chalks; but chalks are so dirty, and the human figure is rather uninteresting without clothes. Hark! that's papa's knock."

It was; and Mark Chamney came striding up the stairs presently, and burst into the drawing-room, out of breath, but looking big enough and strong enough to defy the destroyer Death. But it was only the large outline left of the once herculean form; the clothes hung loose upon the shrunken figure.

"That's right," he said, pleased at finding those two together. "Then you two have contrived to make friends without me?"

"We were friends already," answered Flora; "for I knew how you liked Dr. Ollivant."

"You'll stop to dinner, of course?" said Mark; "and Flora shall sing to us while we drink our wine."

The doctor hesitated. He was a reading man, and his quiet evenings were very precious to him. His mother would wait dinner for him. No, that might be avoided, for his brougham was below, and he could send the man home with a message. But she would be not the less disappointed; he so rarely dined away from her. Duty and reason cried "Dine in Wimpole-street," but the voice of inclination drowned them, and he stayed where he was.

"I never take wine after dinner," he said; "but I'll stay to hear Miss Chamney sing."

CHAPTER III.

"It seems to me that the coming of love is like the coming of spring—the date is not to be reckoned by the calendar. It may be slow and gradual; it may be quick and sudden. But in the morning, when we wake and recognize a change in the world without, verdure on the trees, blossoms on the sward, warmth in the sunshine, music in the air, then we say Spring has come!"

THE young man whom Miss Chamney had observed from her window occasionally—her neighbour at the distance of three doors—was an art-student—not a student of the plodding, drudging order; for the young man had the misfortune to be rich, and it mattered very little to him, from a prudential point of view, whether he were industrious or idle. But, as he had a

passion for art in the abstract, and an ambitious desire to win a name in the list of modern painters, he worked, or seemed to work, furiously. He was, however, somewhat spasmodic in the manner of his toil, and, like Flora, was apt to find the finish of a picture harder work than the beginning. Like Miss Chamney, he discovered human anatomy taken by itself, without the adventitious charm of raiment, to be a dryasdust business; that the human skeleton with its various bones is not altogether satisfying to the imagination; that the prolonged study of limbs unconnected with bodies, however various in the development of their muscles, is apt to pall upon the ardent spirit.

"I suppose Rubens did this kind of thing," said this Mr. Leyburne, after a hard day's work in a private life school, not very far from Fitzroy-square. "He could never have done that foreshortening of the dead Christ in the Antwerp Musuem if he hadn't gone in his hardest for anatomy. But, O, how I wish I were through it all, and at work upon my first historical picture! It does seem such bosh, sometimes, these everlasting fists and elbows and knee-joints. It isn't as if I meant to make my reputation in half-naked Greeks and Romans, Jason and the Golden Fleece, Theseus and Ariadne, Horatius what's-his-name, and that kind of stuff. If ever I grope my way farther back into the mist of ages than the Spanish Armada, may I be convicted of half a column of anachronisms by the *Times* critic. No, Mary Stuart and Bothwell, the murder of the Regent Moray, from a window in Linlithgow,—that's the kind of thing for my money."

Thus spoke Walter Leyburne, half in soliloquy, half in confidence, to his fellow-students, as he shut his day's work in his portfolio, and prepared to take his homeward way. A bright-looking young fellow, nay, handsome, and with an expression that was radiant as a summer morning; blue eyes; straight Greek nose; light auburn moustache, with drooping ends, sedulously trained, only half concealing a somewhat feminine mouth; auburn hair, worn long in the Raffaele fashion, artistic suit of black velvet, boots which would not have disgraced a club in Pall Mall, long supple white hands without gloves, a sprig of stephanotis in his buttonhole, a black-velvet Glengarry in place of the regulation chimney-pot,—a curious admixture of Bohemianism and foppery in his costume.

This was the gentleman whom Flora had occasion to remark once or twice a day from her window. She might have seen him half a dozen times a day had she kept watch for him, his erratic habits causing him to tramp backwards and forwards between his lodgings and the outer world a good deal more often than was necessary to his artistic pursuits. He had chums and companions in arts scattered about the neighbourhood, and

when seized by an original idea, would fling on his Scotch bonnet and rush forth to impart his inspiration to the ear of sympathy. He had appointments for friendly oyster-luncheons, or bitter-beer and sandwiches at a tavern in Rathbone-place, or he wanted something in the artist's-colour way in that district. Thus he was always fitting to and fro, on some pretence or other. He went every night to a theatre or some other place of amusement, to hear the "Chough and Crow" and eat welsh-rarebits at Evans's, to play billards at a public table; and he came home after midnight in a hansom cab, whose doors he flung asunder with a shameless bang. Flora's bower was in the front of the house, so she was wont to hear these post-midnight returns, and this young man's cheery voice chaffing the cabmen. He appeared to pay these functionaries with a lavish generosity, for there were never any complainings or remonstrances, only an interchange of witticisms and friendly good-nights.

It must be a wild, wicked kind of life, thought Flora; and yet the art-student seemed rather an amiable young man. Was there no one—no near relation—father, mother, uncle, aunt, or sister to check this headlong career, no restraining influence to snatch such a good-looking young man from perdition? Flora was really sorry for him.

She was overwhelmed with astonishment when her father came home from the City—he paid occasional visits to that mysterious region—and rubbed his great hands cheerily, exclaiming:

"Flora, I have made an acquaintance. Our circle is widening. If we go on in this way I must get you a brougham to take you out when you pay visits. Only, unfortunately, this is a young man with nobody belonging to him, so far as I can make out."

"A young man, papa!" said Flora. "Who can that be? A younger brother of Dr. Ollivant's?"

"Ollivant never had such a thing as a brother. You must try a little nearer home, Flo. What should you say to that young man in the black-velvet jacket—the young man you've teased me about so often—making me get out of my easy-chair with 'Be quick, pa, he's just turning the corner; do look'?"

"Why, papa, you don't mean that you could go up to him in the street and ask him to be friends with you?" cried Flora, blushing to the roots of her hair at the mere thought of such an outrage of the proprieties, as taught without extra charge by Miss Mayduke, of Notting-hill.

"Not exactly. But what do you think of that young man being intimately connected—indirectly—with my past life?"

Flora shook her head resolutely.

"It couldn't be, papa. It would be too ridiculous."

"I don't see that. Why ridiculous? Because he wears a black-velvet coat, or because you've noticed him from your window?"

"But what do you mean, and what can he have to do with your past life? It isn't as if you were a painter."

"His uncle wasn't a painter, Flo; but he was my employer, and afterwards my partner in Queensland. He married early in life, but had neither chick nor child, as you've heard me say."

Flora nodded. She had heard her father relate his Australian adventures very often indeed, but was never tired of hearing them.

"And when he died all his money went to his only sister's only son. He left it to the sister, and her heirs, executors, and assigns, not knowing that she was dead and gone when he made his will. He had never taken the trouble to send her a ten-pound note, or to inquire if she wanted one, and died leaving her sixty thousand pounds."

"But what has all that to do with the young painter who lives three doors off?" asked Flora, puzzled.

"Only that he is the nephew who inherited the sixty thousand pounds."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Flora with a disappointed air; "and I thought he was a struggling artist who would have to commit suicide by-and-by if he couldn't sell his pictures. That accounts for his conduct to the cabmen."

"What conduct? What cabmen?"

Flora explained.

"And do you mean to say you have made his acquaintance, papa?" she asked afterwards.

"By the merest accident. When I came home I put a little money—only a few odd thousands—into shipping, as you know—never had a secret from you, my darling. I went down to John Maravilla's office—he's the agent, you know—this morning to make an inquiry or two, and who should I see but our friend in the velvet jacket—he had dressed himself more like a Christian to come into the City, but I knew him by his long hair—lounging across Maravilla's desk asking questions about ships and shipping. Maravilla, who was rattling on in his usual way, chuckling as if he had made half a million of money since breakfast, introduced us. 'You ought to know Mr. Leyburne,' he said; 'he has a sixteenth in the Sir Galahad.' 'I ought to know the name of Leyburne,' said I, 'ships or no ships. Had you ever anybody belonging to you called Ferguson?' 'I'm happy to say I had,' answered the young man with the long hair; 'for if I hadn't, I should never have had a share in

Sir Galahad. My uncle, John Ferguson, left me all his money.' 'He was my first and only employer, and best friend,' said I; and we were on the most intimate terms in less than five minutes; and he's going to dine with us this evening."

"Papa!" cried Flora, with a little joyous burst.

"What, you're pleased, are you, missy?" said the father, thoughtfully.

"I doat upon painters, papa, and he looks cleverer than the others who live about here."

"He has the interest of sixty thousand pounds to pay for his fine clothes, my dear, unless he has contrived to fritter away any of the principal. Yes, he's coming at seven o'clock this evening. I thought we ought to be civil to him for the sake of his poor old uncle, who was a good friend to me in spite of the brandy-bottle."

"Of course, papa, it's the least we can do to be kind to him, and perhaps he'll help me a little with my painting. I'm copying a study called 'Gulnare,' with long plaits and the dearest little Greek cap, but the flesh tints will come so very purple in the shadows, as if poor Gulnare had been taking nitrate of silver. Perhaps Mr. Leyburne—rather a pretty name, isn't it?—could tell me how to improve my flesh tints."

"Perhaps," said her father absently. "Strange, isn't it, missy, that I should come across this young fellow? When I hunted up Cuthbert Ollivant, I thought he was the only friend I had or was ever likely to have in the world, and now this young man seems as if he were a kind of nephew of mine."

"Of course he must be, since he is Mr. Ferguson's nephew, and Mr. Ferguson made your fortune. But, O, papa," cried Flora, shaking her head solemnly, "I'm afraid he's rather a wicked young man."

"How do you mean wicked, Baby?"

This was a favourite pet name for Flora. As he had called her Baby and thought of her as Baby in the far-away Australian days, so it best pleased Mark Chamney to call her Baby now.

"Wild, papa—dreadfully dissipated. He comes home late every night, in hansom cabs, and it's ever so much wickeder to ride in a hansom than a four-wheeler, papa, isn't it? Mrs. Gage told me so. 'Hansom cabs and wildness go together, Miss Flora,' she said."

Mrs. Gage was a mysterious female—elderly, lachrymose, and had seen better days—whom Mr. Chamney had picked up for his housekeeper.

"Never mind Mrs. Gage. I hope there's no harm in that young fellow, in spite of his late hours. I should be sorry to think it, for there's something frank and pleasant in his

manner, and I shouldn't have asked him here if I thought he was dissipated."

"Perhaps twelve o'clock or a quarter past isn't so *very* late, papa?" said Flora thoughtfully.

"You're very exact, Baby."

"I can't help hearing him, papa—just under my window, as it were."

Flora was in quite a flutter of excitement all the afternoon. They had positively no friends except Dr. and Mrs. Ollivant. It was quite a wonder for them to expect any one to dinner. She made her father take her to Covent Garden to buy fruit for dessert, and chose bananas and pomegranates and prickly pears, and divers other recondite productions of nature, all of which belied their good looks and were flavourless to the palate. But it was her childish fancy to adorn the table with something uncommon—picturesque, even—which might charm the painter's eye by its novel form and colour. Mrs. Gage had been bidden to prepare a good dinner, but as that worthy woman's mind never soared above oxtail soup and cod's head and shoulders, roast beef and boiled fowls, there was no such thing as originality to be hoped for from her.

"I don't suppose he cares very much what he eats," thought Flora, who had fixed ideas upon the subject of this young man. "He looks superior to that. But, O, I hope he won't drink a great deal and get horribly tipsy, so that papa will never ask him again."

This idea was dreadful. But what can one expect from a young man who comes home late in a hansom?

There was an interval between the return from Covent Garden, laden with those curious products of the tropics, and seven o'clock. Flora devoted this time to arranging and rearranging her drawings, undecided which she should venture to show Mr. Leyburne. She must show him one of them, or how could she hope for any enlightening counsel upon the subject of flesh tints? But seen in the light of her new timidity, they all appeared too bad to exhibit. Juliet's mouth was out of drawing; Gulnare's left eye had a decidedly intoxicated look; an old man with a white beard—a study of "Benevolence"—was more purple by candlelight than she could have supposed possible. A group of camellias had been obviously copied from originals—cut out of turnips; a vase of fuchsia was painfully suggestive of pickled cabbage. Flora shut her portfolio in despair.

"I'd better show him all of them, and then he'll know what a miserable dauber I am," she said to herself. "How I wish he were poor, so that it would be a charity to take lessons of him!" And then she ran into the next room to dress; shook down the wealth of her dark rippling hair, and rolled it up again in the

most bewitching manner imaginable—one broad massive plait twisted round the small head like a diadem; and put on a blue-silk dress—the dress her father had praised so often—rich lace encircling the graceful throat, loose sleeves half revealing the soft round arms. She had unlimited money to spend upon finery, and indulged her girlish fancy with all manner of prettinesses, locketts, ribbons, and laces—all the things she had longed for in her schooldays.

The dingy maroon curtains were drawn and big fires burning in the two drawing-rooms, whereby those apartments had almost a cheerful look despite their bareness. Mark Chamney was seated in his favourite arm-chair, hard as a brick-bat but capacious, with his legs extended across the hearth-rug in his accustomed attitude, reading the evening paper.

"Can't think what the deuce men find to amuse them in the papers," he said.

"That's what you always say, papa; yet you never read anything else."

"I can't say I care about books, Baby. I like to know that what I'm reading is the last thing I could read. What's the good of history, for instance? this week falsifies last week. I don't care about knowing what has been—I only want to know what is. How smart you've made yourself, missy! You don't often favour *me* with the sight of that blue gown."

"I thought as we had company, papa——"

"Company! the young man from next door but three! That's his knock, I daresay."

Flora's heart gave a little flutter. She was thinking of those dreadful daubs up-stairs, and wondering whether she would ever muster courage to exhibit them—wondering a little too what this young painter, of whom she had only caught flying glimpses at a distance, would be like when she saw him face to face.

He came into the room while she was wondering, was introduced to her, and shook hands with her in a rapid easy manner that was not ungentlemanlike.

He was certainly good-looking, of that there could be no doubt; handsome even; faultlessly arrayed in evening-dress. The only eccentricity in his appearance was the long fair hair. Flora had expected to see him in his black-velvet coat, with perhaps a smear of paint here and there to show that he had only just laid aside his palette, and, behold, he was dressed like any other young man, spotless, irreproachable. Flora was almost disappointed.

He was the easiest young man in the world to get on with, his communicative disposition serving as a key wherewith to open the doors of friendship's temple. He told them all about himself; his longings, his aspirations, his intention of going to

Rome by-and-by for a year or two, to work hard; as if there were something in the air of that eternal city which must needs make him industrious.

He asked a great many questions about his departed uncle, whom he had never seen, and the strange life among the lonely sheep-walks, and thus drew Mark Chamney on to talk confidentially, and to tell his longest stories. Altogether it was a most cheerful dinner-party, much more cheerful than when Dr. Ollivant had dined with them; Dr. Ollivant, although far better informed, not being so good a talker as Walter Leyburne.

After the dessert, which was a success, in spite of the spikiness and stringiness of the tropical fruits, they went up-stairs together. It had been an extreme relief to Flora to perceive that the painter drank nothing but a tumbler of claret throughout his repast. He was not therefore prone to intemperance, which she imagined a common vice among men of genius who came home after midnight. It was so nice, too, to find him eager to drink the tea she poured out for him presently, just as if he had been the most correctly-minded of the curate species.

He caught sight of the open piano while he was sipping his tea, and brightened visibly.

"You play and sing," he said. "I thought as much."

"Only easy music," she answered shyly; "little bits of Mendelssohn, where the accidentals are not too dreadful, and old songs that papa likes. I have a book full—dear old things, that belonged to poor mamma. I am afraid you would laugh at the very look of them—such faded notes and common-looking paper; but they seem to me prettier than any I can buy at the music-sellers'."

"I am sure they are pretty," replied Walter with enthusiasm; "or you would not sing them."

"His manner to girls in general, no doubt," thought Flora.

She went to the piano at her father's bidding, and sang one after another of the old ballads her mother had loved, the tender plaintive music of years gone by—"We met," and "She wore a wreath of roses," "Young Love lived once in a humble shed," and "The light guitar;" while Walter Leyburne hung over the piano enchanted, and looked and listened—there were no leaves to turn, for Flora played from memory—and fancied that his hour was come; that Destiny, which had done pretty well for him by flinging sixty thousand pounds into his lap, desired to bestow upon him this still higher boon, for the perfection and completion of his lot.

Mark Chamney lay back in his arm-chair, smoking—tobacco had been the chief solace of his lonely life on the other side of the world, and it was not to be supposed that his little girl

would deny him the comfort of his pipe wheresoever he chose to enjoy it—and watching the two figures at the piano.

The young man seemed all that youth should be—candid, generous, ardent. It was a curious hazard that had made them neighbours. It seemed something more than hazard which had created these two young creatures so near of an age, and with so many fancies and attributes in common.

“It would seem almost the natural course of events, if——” thought Mr. Chamney, and did not take the trouble to finish the sentence in his own mind, the conclusion being so obvious.

After having dutifully sung her father’s favourite ballads, Flora, ventured to speak, with extreme shyness and faltering, about painting.

“I’m afraid it is very difficult to paint,” she said, in a speculative way, still perched upon the music-stool, looking down at the keyboard and fingering the black notes dumbly, as if seeking inspiration from sharp and flats. “I don’t mean like Raffaele, or Titian, or any of those——”

“Heavy swells,” interjected Walter, seeing her at a loss.

She laughed a little at this, and grew a shade bolder.

“But just tolerably, to amuse oneself.”

“Why, then, you paint!” cried the young man, enraptured.

“I didn’t say that.”

“O, yes, you did. Pray do show me what you have done.”

“They’re so horrid,” pleaded Flora.

“No, they are beautiful, equal to Rosa Bonheur’s.”

“O, no, no. And they are not animals.”

“I insist on your showing them to me this moment.”

Her father rang the bell, and ordered Miss Chamney’s portfolio. There was no time for reflection. Before she could collect her senses, the book was open on the table, and Walter Leyburne was looking over the drawings, with little muttered exclamations, and frownings, and smilings.

“Upon my word there’s a good deal of talent in them,” he said cheerily, and then began to show what was wrong, where the drawing was out, or the brush had been used too heavily.

“You shouldn’t have been in such a hurry to go into colour,” he said, at which Flora despaired; for what is life worth to the artistic mind of seventeen if one cannot dabble with colours?

“Drawing is such dry work,” she exclaimed, raising her pretty eyebrows.

“Not if you go into it thoroughly,” replied Mr. Leyburne, forgetting sundry expressions of disgust and impatience that had fallen from his own lips a few days ago in relation to the muscles of a gladiator. “I wish your papa would let me come in now and then for half an hour, and put you on the right

tack; and I could lend you some casts to copy. You ought to draw from the round."

Flora beamed with smiles, but looked at her father doubtfully.

"I don't see any objection," said Mr. Chamney; "name your time, and I'll be here to see that Baby is an obedient pupil."

The business was settled on the spot, and a farther arrangement made, to the effect that Mr. and Miss Chamney were to inspect Mr. Leyburne's studio next day.

"It might amuse you to see a hard-working man's painting-room," said Walter, with extreme pride in the epithet "hard-working." "And if you will do me the honour to lunch with me, I'll make things as comfortable as a miserable dog of a bachelor can ever hope to make them."

This with extreme scorn of his condition, as if he were the most abandoned of earth's inhabitants.

Flora clasped her hands joyously. "O, papa, do let us go!" she cried; "I never saw a painter's studio in all my life."

Whereupon the invitation was accepted, Mr. Chamney desiring nothing better than to be led by the light hand of his little girl.

CHAPTER IV.

"I am too old for mere play, too young to be without a wish. What can the world afford me? "Thou shalt renounce!" "Thou shalt renounce!" That is the eternal song which is rung in every one's ears; which, our whole life long, every hour is hoarsely singing to us."

AFTER the luncheon in the painting-room came another dinner at Mr. Chamney's, a lesson twice a week, an intimacy which ripened daily—until after a fortnight of this rapid progress it suddenly occurred to Mr. Chamney that he ought to make his new friend, Leyburne, known to his old friend, Ollivant. The curious hazard that had brought about this friendship would be sure to interest the doctor; nor could he fail to be interested in that romantic notion which lurked unexpressed in the mind of Flora's father.

A little note from Mrs. Ollivant to Flora came just at this time:

"Dear Miss Chamney,—Why don't you come to see me? Perhaps I ought to have told you that I am an old woman—though you might see as much as that for yourself—with a rooted affection for my own fireside, so you must not expect

visits from me. We are so near each other that I think I may ask you to spend your evenings with me now and then without any farther invitation. If your papa will come with you, so much the better. The doctor will always be pleased to see him.

"By the way, I hear you are a very sweet singer, and I must beg you to bring your music.

"Very faithfully yours,

"LETITIA OLLIVANT."

"Then the doctor must have praised my singing," thought Flora, wonderingly; "and he hardly said a civil word about it to my face. Only looked at me with those dark solemn eyes of his. So different from Mr. Leyburne."

Mr. Leyburne had been led on to confess to a tenor voice, and there had been evenings devoted to "*La ci darem la mano*" and "Sull' aria."

"We'll go to Wimpole-street this evening," said Mr. Chamney, when he had read Mrs. Ollivant's note.

"Yes, papa; but suppose Mr. Leyburne should call?"

"We can't help that, Baby. I'm always glad to see him when he likes to drop in; but we can't be at home every night."

"No, papa," rather regretfully; "but we were getting on so nicely with '*La ci*.'"

"There'll be plenty of time for '*La ci*.' You see, Flora, I feel as if the doctor ought to be told about our new acquaintance."

"But what can it matter to him, papa?"

"Why, in the first place, he is my oldest friend; and in the second place, I look upon him almost as your guardian."

"My guardian, papa!" with an alarmed look. "What can I want with a guardian when I have you?"

"While you have me,—no, dear. Only—only people die, you know——"

"Papa, papa," flying to his breast, and clinging to him passionately, "how can you say such dreadful things?"

"A fact in natural history, Baby. A universal epidemic. We must all take it, sooner or later. Don't be frightened, pet. I don't mean to say that I am going off the hooks yet awhile. But I made my will the other day—a necessary act in every man's life, you know, darling—and I put Ollivant in as your guardian and trustee. There isn't any one you'd like better, is there, Flo?"

"I shouldn't like any one. I don't want a guardian or a trustee; I only want you."

"And you shall have me, darling, as long as God pleases. May it be long, dear, for both our sakes!"

Flora echoed the prayer faintly, choked by sobs.

Mrs. Ollivant received them in her prim drawing-room, where not an object was disarranged from one week's end to another; the crimson tabinet-covered chairs—bought a great bargain by the country practitioner at a local sale—with their backs always glued to the wall; the tables with the same blotting-books and envelope-cases, scent-bottles and albums, which Cuthbert remembered in his earliest boyhood, adorning the chief apartment at Long Sutton; the mantelpiece ornaments of the same era; a grim-looking black-and-gilt clock in the sham-Greek fashion of the French Consulate; a pair of black-and-gilt candelabra sustained by sphinxes; some cups and saucers of Oriental ware; the looking-glass over the chimney framed in black-and-gilt, corresponding with an oval mirror at the other end of the room; a pair of attenuated console-tables between the long narrow windows, surmounted by meagre strips of looking-glass, and adorned with more cups and saucers. The carpet was an ancient Brussels, of a vegetable or floral design, which had once presented the various colouring seen in mixed pickles, but was now faded to the palest of drabs, and yellowest of greens, and dingiest of browns. Altogether, the room had a meagre and faded aspect; but Mrs. Ollivant thought it beautiful, and suffered not a speck of dust to rest upon the shining surfaces of tables and chair-backs.

She was sitting at her work-table, reading by the light of a shaded lamp, when her visitors were announced, alone. An hour's talk after dinner was the most her son could afford her, and the hour having expired, he had withdrawn to his study.

"Light the candles, James," she said to the butler, "and tell your master Mr. and Miss Chamney are here. I doubt if any other name would tempt him away from his books," she said graciously.

The man lighted a pair of wax candles in the Egyptian candelabra, which faintly illumined the region of the mantelpiece, and were reflected feebly in the dark depths of the looking-glass.

The dimly-lighted room seemed dreary to Flora, even after the barrenness of the Fitzroy-square drawing-rooms. Life there was a kind of bivouac, which was not without its charm. But here every object told of days gone by; of people who had long been dead; hopes that had never known fruition; dreams that had been dreamed in vain; the unspeakable melancholy that belongs to commonplace objects that have grown old.

Mrs. Ollivant, like her surroundings, had the air of belonging to an age gone by. She wore her hair and her dress in the same fashion that had obtained at Long Sutton seven-and-thirty years ago. Her dark hair was half-hidden by the Mechlin-lace lappets which had been one of her wedding presents, and fastened with a tortoiseshell comb that had been her mother's. So had the

amethyst brooch which united her lace collar. Her iron-gray silk gown was made as scantily and as plainly as Miss Skipton, the chief dressmaker of Long Sutton, had made her dresses when she married. She had changed nothing—the hand of Time had even respected the calm thoughtful face, and had scarcely marked the progress of the quiet years by a wrinkle. Passion had ploughed no lines there, rancour had left no ugly imprint. It would have been hard to imagine a face which indicated a more tranquil existence, a serener soul. And yet there was an indefinable melancholy in the countenance, as of a woman who had only half lived, whose life had been rather like the winter sleep of hibernating animals than the ardent changeful existence of warm-blooded mankind.

She brightened, in her own calm way, at sight of Flora, held out her arms, to which the girl came half shyly, and kissed her with a more maternal kiss than Miss Mayduke.

“So good of you, Miss Chamney——”

“Flora, if you please, dear Mrs. Ollivant.”

“Flora, of course. So good of you, Flora, to remember an old woman.”

“I have not so many friends that I could forget you; and if I had ever so many, I’m sure I shouldn’t. But we’ve made a new one, and papa is going to tell you all about him.”

“A new friend!”

“A new friend!” echoed a voice by the door. They turned and saw Dr. Ollivant standing there with a serious attentive face. He came slowly into the room, like a man who was half worn out by the day’s work, and shook hands with his visitors—Flora first, with a brief but keen scrutiny of the eager blushing face, and then with her father.

“And where may you have picked up your new friend, Chamney?” he asked, dropping into his favourite chair, while Flora, at Mrs. Ollivant’s entreaty, took off a coquettish little hat and a sealskin jacket.

“Where did I pick him up? You may well say that. It was a regular case of picking up. I think I told you the other night that I am interested in shipping; only to the extent of a few loose thousands, but still interested.” And then he went on to tell his story, at which Dr. Ollivant looked unutterably grave, as if listening to the confession of a felony, and speculating how he could assist his friend to escape penal servitude.

Flora watched him with the deepest mortification. He did not show one ray of enthusiasm; he did not attempt to congratulate them upon the acquisition of this treasure, a young painter with a charming tenor voice and the most good-natured readiness to instruct her in the art of correct drawing.

“If you ask my candid opinion, Chamney,” said the doctor at

last, with that brooding face of his still turned to the fire, and not to his friend, "my opinion is that you have done a very foolish thing."

"Eh?"

"A most inconsiderate thing. You admit a young man to a position of intimacy. You open your doors to him, and make him, as it were, a member of your own family, simply upon the strength of his having had a particular man for his uncle, without a single inquiry as to his character, or the remotest knowledge of his antecedents. What is this Mr.—Leyburne, I think you said, the better for being the nephew of a certain John Ferguson, a man who drank himself to death in the wilds of Australia?"

"I owe John Ferguson every penny I possess," muttered Chamney.

"Perhaps. And I daresay he owed it to you that he didn't lose or squander every penny he possessed. At any rate I cannot admit that this Leyburne has any lien on your gratitude. And if you take my advice, having let a scamp into your house in an evil hour, you will take the earliest opportunity of kicking him out of it. Of course I mean in a metaphorical sense."

"I should hope so," said Flora, half crying. She had hardly ever felt so disappointed. It seemed so hard to find such a want of sympathy and friendliness in their oldest friend. "Mr. Leyburne is not at all the kind of young man to submit to be kicked, even by papa. And as for his being a scamp, it is very cruel and unjust of you to say such a thing, Dr. Ollivant, about a person you don't know. I'm sure if you were to see his studio you'd think very differently; everything so neat and orderly and, if one may so, gentlemanlike; and casts in the most difficult attitudes, beautifully copied in chalk. He showed us the copies, didn't he, papa?"

Mr. Chamney nodded. He had taken his lecture meekly enough. Had not little Ollivant been accustomed to lecture him two-and-twenty years ago, upon the subject of his inaptitude for the study of Virgil, and his sluggishness of intellect with regard to hyperbolas and parabolas?

Dr. Ollivant looked at Flora with a curiously contemplative gaze, half scornful, as of a foolish child, half interested, as in a rather amusing young woman.

"Very well, let it be so," he said. "We will suppose the young man to be perfection."

"He sings beautifully," murmured Flora.

"We will admit him to be an acquisition. Don't be alarmed, mother, Miss Chamney and I are not going to quarrel. You'll sing my mother some of those old ballads, by-and-by, won't you Miss Chamney?"

"Call me Flora, please," she said, pacified by his half-apology. "No one calls me Miss Chamney."

"Not even Mr. Leyburne?"

"O, yes, he, of course. But he is a young man."

"That makes a difference, I suppose. Then I shall call you Flora; or, if you are angry with me, as you were just now, perhaps I may call you Baby, like papa."

"No, please, I can't allow that; nobody but papa must call me a foolish name."

The doctor's factotum now appeared with the tea-tray, and at the doctor's bidding lighted more candles on the old fashioned cabinet piano. Mrs. Ollivant made tea with the presentation urn and teapot that testified to her husband's skill in restoring health to the sickly inhabitants of Long Sutton,—made tea in the homely old English fashion, and was gratified when told her tea was good.

After tea Flora consented to sing, but not quite with her usual willingness. She had not forgotten the doctor's unkindness about her painter—her painter—the first genius she had ever known, the first human creature she had ever heard talk familiarly of Titian and Rubens and Reynolds, as if he had painted side by side with them. Nor did the doctor's grave dark eyes, fixed on her so often with a calm scrutiny, inspire such confidence as on his visit to Fitzroy-square. Then she had liked him, and trusted him, and been ready to open her guileless heart to him as her father's friend. To-night she looked at him with a new feeling, almost akin to horror, thinking that if God took away her father this man would only stand between her and the desolate outer world. This man would be her legal defender: perhaps her tyrant.

She had the vaguest notions of a guardian's power, what he could or could not do. But it seemed to her that his power must be very great. He was, as it were, a father by law—and would have all a father's authority, with none of a father's love.

And then that bare suggestion that her father might die, that an awful severance might end their happy union, had come upon her spirit like a sudden blast from the frozen north. She was half heart-broken as she sat down to sing her little collection of old ballads, and the voice with which she began the "Land of the Leal" was even more plaintive than its wont.

O that she too might feel herself drifting gently away to that better land, so that when her father's time came there might be no parting; that she who loved him so dearly might never be left in the barren world without him!

Mrs. Ollivant praised her voice, but wondered she should choose such sorrowful songs—she had sung her saddest that night. She was very quiet all the evening, sitting by the fire-

side listening to her father and the doctor. Mrs. Ollivant's little attempts to draw her out failed altogether. She had a new sense of unhappiness since that brief conversation with her father, and felt as if she could never be joyous again.

Mark Chamney talked about Australia, his favourite topic, and Dr. Ollivant listened with his quietly attentive manner, saying little more than was necessary to keep his friend in full swing. Later he asked some questions about Mr. Chamney's plans for the future.

"You don't mean to waste all your life in that old house you have taken, I suppose?" he said. "It's very well for a professional man like me to live mewed-up in a London house all the year round; but I've always considered that a man is only half alive who lives always in the same place. You'll travel, I suppose, when the winter is over, and show your daughter something of the world—something more than she could find out from her maps and geographies at school.

"I should like it well enough," answered the other thoughtfully; "only you know I'm a kind of patient of yours. Do you think I'm strong enough for that sort of work?"

Flora watched the doctor's face breathlessly at this point, but that calm visage told her nothing, or only that Cuthbert Ollivant was by nature serious and thoughtful, not a man to speak lightly or be lightly moved from any purpose of his own.

"Not to Mont Blanc or the Jungfrau, perhaps," he said with his quiet smile—that reassuring smile which had so often given birth to vain hopes in the breasts of those that beheld it. But then hope is the best medicine for a patient, the most potent stimulus for a nurse; and a doctor who was not hopeful would rarely cure.

"You're not strong enough to go to work in the same wild way you would have done twenty years ago," he went on; "but I believe change of scene and easy-going travelling—travelling is made uncommonly easy nowadays—would do you a world of good, as well as afford pleasure to Miss Chamney"—he could not quite bring himself to call her by her pretty Christian name yet awhile—"who must inevitably suffer if you keep her shut-up in Fitzroy-square much longer."

"But I am not shut-up," the girl answered eagerly; "we go for nice walks—don't we, papa?—in the other squares, and sometimes in Regent's Park. I am quite happy in London. But do you really think travelling would do papa good, Dr. Ollivant?"

"I do, most decidedly."

"If so, let us travel at once. I am ready to start to-morrow."

"I should recommend waiting for fine weather."

"Then we will wait for fine weather. We will do whatever is best for papa. But he is not ill, is he, Dr. Ollivant?"

"Ill!" exclaimed Mark Chamney; "why, what could put such a notion into this foolish Baby's head?" A timely reply, which saved Dr. Ollivant the embarrassment of being obliged to answer with one of his professional circumlocutions. He felt as if he could hardly endure to speak anything less than the truth to this girl, even at the risk of breaking her heart. "Will you dine with us to-morrow night, Ollivant, and see what kind of a fellow our new friend is?" Mr. Chamney said by-and-by, when Flora was putting on her hat.

"Certainly. Miss Chamney's enthusiasm has awakened my curiosity. I should like to behold this paragon."

Mrs. Ollivant gave a little sarcastic laugh, like an echo of her son's scornful tone. His opinions were her opinion. For him to dislike or disapprove was enough for her. That slow solitary life at Long Sutton had given her only this one creature to love and admire. From the hour of his birth she had worshipped him, had lived upon the thought of him during their severance, and existed only to please him now that they were reunited. He was her fetish.

"Come now, Mrs. Ollivant," said Mark in his hearty way, unmindful of that ironical laugh; "you'll come with your son, won't you? Flora, beg of Mrs. Ollivant to come."

But Flora could not forgive that disparaging laugh, and said nothing. Mrs. Ollivant excused herself on the ground of never going anywhere—indeed, her son had never made for himself friends, at whose festive gatherings she might have been a guest. He had lived his own life, which was a solitary and sequestered life, and she had lived only for him.

"My son will be with you," she said, "and he will be able to form an opinion of your new acquaintance. He is an acute judge of character." Her tone implied that the doctor was going to sit upon Walter Leyburne in the combined character of judge and jury.

"Papa," said Flora, while they were going home in the cab, "I begin positively to dislike your Ollivants."

"No, Baby," cried Mr. Chamney alarmed, "for God's sake don't say that. Such worthy people; such straightforward, conscientious people—and the only friends I have in the world."

"Except Mr. Leyburne, papa."

"My darling, we mustn't count Mr. Leyburne. You're so impetuous, Flora; and I begin to feel I have done wrong in asking him to my house——"

"Only since that horrid doctor has talked you into thinking so, papa."

My dearest child, you must not say such things. There isn't a better fellow in the world than Ollivant."

"But, papa, it's more than twenty years ago since you saw anything of him; time enough for a man to develop into a murderer. He might be very well as a schoolboy, but I am sure he's odious as a man."

"Flora, this is shameful!" exclaimed Mr. Chamney, getting angry. "I insist upon your speaking with proper respect of Dr. Ollivant. I tell you again, he is my only friend. A man who lives the lonely life I lived for twenty years has no chance of making many friendships; and I rely on his protection for you when I am gone. There, there, don't cry. What a foolish girl you are! I am only talking of future possibilities."

"If it were possible that I could lose you, and be thrown upon the mercy of that man, I think I should throw myself out of the cab this moment," said the undisciplined Flora, sobbing.

CHAPTER V.

*"Is it thy will, thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?
Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken,
While shadows, like to thee, do mock my sight?"*

THE undisciplined Flora relented a little next day when the doctor came to dinner, and deported himself with a peculiar graciousness towards Walter Leyburne. There had been time for Cuthbert Ollivant to think in the interval, and he had suffered no little shame and self-scorn at the thought of his petty burst of temper with reference to the unknown painter.

"If I am to be his daughter's guardian some day—and God only knows how soon the day may come—I have some right to interfere, so far as to prevent that good-natured simpleton bringing dangerous people into his house; a painter, too; and a Bohemian, no doubt. And that silly girl is evidently in love with him already. But it was foolish of me to lose my temper about it."

Very foolish, no doubt; and Cuthbert Ollivant was not a man prone to foolishness. He wondered at his own impetuosity, and determined to make up for his folly by extra civility to the obnoxious painter, by a calm and dispassionate consideration of the entire subject.

"A good-looking young man, with sixty thousand pounds,

bound to Chamney by the associations of the past, and met with by the merest hazard in the city of London. It seems like a story-book. And the natural conclusion of the story would be a marriage between the painter and Flora Chamney. I wonder whether it will end that way. I fancy that is what Chamney has in his head; and he wants me to approve."

He was walking up and down his consulting-room at the close of his day's labour, meditating upon this subject, as he had meditated many times during his daily round.

"After all, it would be the best thing that could happen for me. If she marries in her father's lifetime, she will want no guardian except her husband. And what should I do with a pretty girl for my ward? It's all very well to say my mother would take the care of her, and the management of her, off my hands. I should be responsible for her welfare all the same. And if she took it into her head to marry a scamp then, it would be much worse than her marrying a scamp now."

A quiet contemplation of the subject in this light was calculated to make Dr. Ollivant well disposed towards Mr. Leyburne; yet he had no friendly feeling for that person as he walked from Wimpole-street to Fitzroy-square. It was a calm clear evening, and even London in November was not utterly odious.

He found the subject of his thoughts standing by the drawing-room fire talking to Flora—talking as if they had been first-cousins, allied by a lifetime of recollections and associations. Walter Leyburne's frank fair face was turned to him with a friendly smile in the lamplight, as Mr. Chamney introduced the two men; and the doctor was compelled to confess to himself that the face was pleasant, and even handsome. But, then, how many a scamp has a pleasant handsome face! It is almost an attribute of scamphood. A scamp with sixty thousand pounds, however, is a less common character.

Perhaps something in the young man's cordial easy manner pleased Dr. Ollivant in spite of his prejudices; perhaps he had schooled himself by an effort to seem friendly. In any case, he did make himself agreeable to Mr. Leyburne, and regained Flora's good opinion. He saw the change in her, and divined its meaning.

"To win her good-will, I have only to be civil to this fellow," he said to himself. "A poor compliment to me, as an individual."

The little dinner was the gayest they had yet had in Fitzroy-square. Dr. Ollivant would not allow Mr. Leyburne to have the talk all to himself. He talked of every subject that was started, and talked well—with that tone of calm superiority which superior age and superior learning impart—spoke of art even, showing himself master of all the critic's technicalities.

"I did not know you cared about pictures," said Flora, looking at him as if she beheld him suddenly in a new light, with some touch of wonder too, as if he were not the kind of man she could have supposed capable of appreciating pictures, or music, or flowers, or any of the more delicate charms of life.

"Yes," he said, in his quiet way, "I do like—good pictures. There is about one in every year's exhibition that I should care to possess."

"What a pity for all the other fellows!" said Walter, piqued by the conviction that the doctor would not like *his* pictures.

"I didn't see any pictures in Wimpole-street," said Mr. Chamney.

"No; the Wimpole-street furniture is my mother's, just as it came from Long Sutton—ugly, but familiar. It was hard enough to root her out of the Devonshire soil. I was obliged to bring away a little earth about the roots. In short, the old chairs and tables do well enough for me. I have not gone in for the refinements of life."

"Which means that you are a confirmed old bachelor, I suppose?" said Chamney, with his good-natured laugh.

"I suppose so. I believe it is an understood thing that a man who doesn't marry before he's thirty is a confirmed bachelor. And yet there are instances of passion after that age, or history lies strangely."

"Mark Antony, for example," cried Walter, with a keen recollection of that useful personage to the art-world, Cleopatra."

The dinner was altogether agreeable. Dr. Ollivant appeared in a new light—not the grave quiet physician, with dark contemplative eyes and a leaning to silence, but a man of many words—words that had a colour and sparkle about them, like finely-cut gems—enthusiastic, eloquent even. And above all, he was gracious to Walter Leyburne. Flora was subjugated; wondered that there could be such a clever man in the world, as it were unknown and unappreciated; for she reckoned it as nothing that a man should have secured a fair practice, and a name in his profession, at five-and-thirty. There was a latent bitterness, a minor strain faintly audible in the doctor's most brilliant talk; a vague sadness that touched the tender girl-nature. She was inclined to pity him a little, as a man who had grown old in the dismal drudgery of a learned profession, and lived a lonely joyless life in a house that had a dreary look despite its well-ordered comfort.

She glanced from the doctor to Youth and Hope incarnate, in the person of Walter Leyburne; a creature all smiles and brightness, whose nature seemed brimming over with joy, like a glass of sparkling wine in which a thousand tiny bubbles come

leaping up to the surface, as if they would say, "We are the emblems of all earthborn joys; see how soon we vanish!"

Yes; that contrast between the slave of science and the disciple of art touched her; so she spoke to the doctor in her kindest tones, out of pure pity.

The three gentlemen went up to the drawing-room with Flora directly after dinner, and she had Dr. Ollivant on her hands while she poured out the tea, Mr. Chamney and the painter having planted themselves on the hearth-rug to fight out a political battle. Mr. Leyburne was a Radical, who derived his principles from Shelley and Leigh Hunt, and was somewhat astonished to find his pet theories bear no better blossom than broken park-palings and trade-unionism; Mr. Chamney was a Conservative, on the ground of having money in the Funds.

"No man with an interest in the government securities of his country has a right to be a Radical," he said. "The man who has anything to keep is bound to be a Conservative. I was a thorough-paced 'rad' when I worked my way out to Melbourne; but the day I began to save money was the day on which I went over to the opposition. Don't talk to me of the Revolt of Islam. What I see around us, sir, is the revolt of the tailors, the tinkers, the bakers, the candlestick-makers—a revolt whose inevitable result is the impoverishment of the well-to-do classes."

While they were arguing this thesis, Dr. Ollivant was making his peace with Flora. A pleasant business it seemed to him, that business of reconciliation—and so new. To sit by the lamp-lit table and watch the fair hands moving noiselessly among the teacups, the sweet face bent a little in womanly solicitude, the soft eyes looking up at him half-shyly, half-confidingly, now and then, as his words made some special appeal to her attention. It was the newest thing that life could offer him; as strange as if he had found himself emperor of half the world."

"You were very angry with me last night, I'm afraid?" he said, with a smile that was rather provoking, Flora thought, as if he remembered her indignation with some sense of amusement, as at the anger of a petted child.

"I thought you unkind and unjust," she answered.

"Because I ventured to express a doubt of your paragon—not having seen him, remember, and being therefore unaffected by the magic of his numerous graces."

"That sounds as if you were still sneering at him. But now you have seen him, I hope you think a little better of him."

"I think him a very agreeable young man, after the pattern of numerous other young men. But I am not even yet reconciled to his introduction here—to the privileged position which he occupies—while your father knows so little about him."

"We know that he is the nephew of papa's old partner."

"I cannot recognise that as a certificate of character. George Barnwell was a nephew. However, I will say no more, since you like him so much."

"I like him because he is so kind to me," replied Flora, blushing a little, but still answering with her accustomed frankness. "He is teaching me to draw correctly, and he sings—delightfully."

She would have used a stronger word—divinely—but checked herself, in fear of Dr. Ollivant's ridicule.

"What! he sings, does he? It seems he has all the gifts." This was said with a regretful sigh, that moved Flora again to pity.

"He is not a clever doctor like you," she said, eager to console; "he cannot bring hope and healing to the sick and sorrowful, nor can he talk like you. I thought he was the best talker in the world, till to-night."

The doctor smiled his slow thoughtful smile. Was it possible that his deeper thought and wider knowledge had impressed even this shallow frivolous girl; that she had discovered in him at least something which her new favourite lacked?

Not much longer did he enjoy the privilege of her sole attention. She was called away to sing presently.

"A duet, if you like, Mr. Leyburne," she said. So the doctor heard the two fresh young voices blending harmoniously, each taking strength and sweetness from the other. If he had been a younger man—a man without fixed purposes and desires to fulfil in life—he might almost have envied Walter Leyburne his pleasant tenor voice, seeing what a strong link it made between these two. But in his character of a man who had dispensed with all small passions and petty vices, sustained always by the real business of his life, he could only listen and approve; or perhaps speculate vaguely upon what that hypothetical younger man might have felt.

Once seated at the piano, Flora did not leave it till she rose to bid her visitors good-night. The old music-books afforded inexhaustible amusement. "Do you know this?" and "Will you sing this?" the two said to each other again and again as they turned the leaves. Whereupon there were attempts which sometimes resulted in success, sometimes in failure; efforts which were hardly intended for the amusement of the doctor or his host, who withdrew to the back drawing-room by-and-by, and sat by the fire talking. Dr. Ollivant faced the larger room, and could watch the two figures by the piano as he talked—and did watch them, as if his words had been little more than a running commentary on that group.

"Well," said Mark Chamney, "what do you think of him?"

"What can I think of him after so short an acquaintance

except that he is good-looking enough, and agreeable enough, and, I should think, conceited enough?" replied the doctor, with his dark watchful eyes upon the figure by the piano.

"There you are wrong. He has no conceit; on the contrary, he has a deprecating way of talking about himself and his own ambition which is very winning."

"Only a novel form of conceit. The man who runs himself down is always a vain man. He is so assured of his own transcendent merits, that, out of mere condescension and good-nature, to let himself down to the level of the ruck, as it were, he pretends to think lightly of himself. I have seen that kind of conceit in my own profession. And then you admit him to be ambitious; *ergo*, he believes in himself."

"His chances of success would be small if he didn't."

"And yet, I suppose, he is a sorry dauber?"

"No, indeed. I don't pretend to be a judge of such matters. A picture to me is a picture, so long as there's plenty of colour about it. His struck me as rather bright and lively."

"Bright and lively!" said the doctor, with a shrug. "Yes, I know the kind of picture; the sort of thing that would make a good sign for an oil and colour shop. However, the young man is well enough in the abstract, Chamney, and I really don't want to quarrel with you about him. Only, to my mind, he is out of place in this house."

"How out of place?"

"Your daughter is young and pretty—rather romantic, I fancy. He is good-looking and adventurous. Have you never speculated upon the possibility of their falling in love with each other?"

"The very thing I have speculated upon; a thing I look upon as almost inevitable."

"O!" said the doctor gravely, with a curious little droop of his flexible lower lip. "In that case I had better withdraw my objections."

"On the contrary, you had better give me a friend's advice with a friend's candour."

"And with the usual risk of giving mortal offence by my friendly truthfulness."

"Now, look here, Ollivant," said Mr. Chamney, coming closer to the doctor. "Of course I know that you're—well, say diabolically clever—and that it's only natural for you to crow over me now as you used to crow over me when we were school-boys, while I was fool enough to like you in spite of the crowing. But this business is one that touches my daughter, and in anything that concerns her interest I protest against being crowed over. You must give me your advice honestly, without chopping logic, as between man and man."

"As between man and man!" repeated the doctor with a musing air. "I never quite caught the meaning of that phrase, though it always seems to stand for a good deal. Upon my word, Chamney, it appears to me that there is no room here for advice. You have set your heart on the match already; and the young lady," with his eyes always turned towards the piano, "seems on the high-road to the same way of thinking."

"Do you see any reason for supposing he would not make her a good husband?" asked Chamney, coming straight to the point. "He has sixty thousand pounds. I can give my girl about half as much; and he is a thoroughly good fellow."

"An opinion you have arrived at after a fortnight's acquaintance," said the doctor.

"Come, Ollivant, I told you just now I want advice not crowing."

"What put this idea into your head?"

"Can you ask me that when you know my uncertain lease of life? What more natural than that I should want to see my darling married before I die; that I should like to know the man to whose keeping all her future life is to be given—all the long years which I shall not see; the years in which she will ripen into womanhood, and have children to love and honour her? I should like to know the father of her children, though I may never live to see them."

"Do you think a fortnight's knowledge is enough?"

"Am I a fool? No, it is only an idea in embryo that I have trusted to you. I am not going to mortgage my darling's future until I can see pretty clearly ahead. But I thought it only right to let you into the secret of my fancy; to let you see the young man, and form your own judgment of his character."

"I am not so keen a judge as to discover a man's worth or worthlessness in a single evening. I should think your protégé somewhat shallow and frivolous; but then that does not matter much to a woman, who is apt to be shallow and frivolous herself."

"That's an old bachelor's notion of women. Then you reserve your opinion, I suppose?"

"I reserve my opinion until I have seen a little more of your paragon."

CHAPTER VI.

“ The Devil and
This fellow are so near, 'tis not yet known
Which is the eviler angel.”

“ Rather the ground that's deep enough for graves,
Rather the stream that's strong enough for waves,
Than the loose sandy drift,
Whose shifting surface cherishes no seed
Either of any flower or any weed,
Which ever way it shift.”

WITHIN a half-mile radius of Fitzroy-square there are streets which, although perhaps not absolutely disreputable—and it is not easy to know in London whether a street is disreputable or not—have a certain air of squalor, dispiriting to the mind of the wandering pedestrian or the cab-driven voyager who may happen to pass through them. Residents are doubtless unconscious of that depressing influence. “Be it ever so humble,” says the song, “there's no place like home;” and the scene which, to the passer-by, is suggestive of low spirits may, to the inhabitant of the spot, breathe only of shrimps and water cresses and the muffin-bell, and all the tender associations of the domestic hearth.

Voysey-street was a street of this order; a broadish street, and with ample room and verge enough in the way of pavement, but purblind at one end, which only held communion with the outer world by a narrow isthmus of alley, where noisy children rioted all day long, and drunken men and women bawled by night, and which possessed for its chief attractions an eel-pie house, and a pork-butcher, popularly supposed, in the immediate neighbourhood, to purvey the finest pork in London. To eat spare-rib or griskin from Billet's was to enjoy a feast which Roman emperors might have envied, in the opinion of Voysey-street and Cave-square round the corner.

There was a court dressmaker in Voysey-street; a young person who exhibited stale fashion-plates and pink-tissue models of elaborate costumes in her window, and who made bonnets at half-a-crown, and dresses at four-and-sixpence, for the surrounding gentry, so that her connection with the Court must have been wholly a matter of imagination and door-plate. There was a chandler's shop at each end, and another in the middle. Indeed, the Voysey-streeters seemed to live almost entirely upon chandlery, and to be curiously independent of butchers' meat. There was a small shop for fish, of the dried and salted order, with occasionally a tub of bulky oysters, or a few limp-looking

plaise, to be had a bargain on sultry summer evenings. There was a newsvendor, who vended a variety of other articles, in the way of tobacco, small fancy goods, brandy-balls and jumbles, fireworks in the festive season of November, and walking-sticks all the year round, and who retailed a good deal of information respecting the immediate neighbourhood gratis across his own counter. These, with one more, a ladies' wardrobe, were all the shops in Voysey-street; the rest of the houses were as private as any house could be in which several families abounding in small children inhabited the various floors, whose lodgers, with furniture and without furniture, seemed to change with all the changes of the moon, whose front parlours were sometimes small academies for the instruction of youth, miscellaneous as to sex and age, whose back parlours sometimes sank as low as mangling. Perhaps one of the shabbiest of the houses in this region of depression and decay was that whose parlour-windows exhibited the flabby stock-in-trade of a ladies' wardrobe. It is curious to observe the air of squalor and disreputability which pervades cast-off garments thus exposed for sale; as though the mere fact of repudiation debased the things, like a son or daughter turned out of doors. There is a hang-dog aspect about that sealskin jacket, which whispers of midnight wanderings and unholy lurkings at street corners; an air half dejection, half indifference, marks that black-lace bonnet, with its garland of tumbled rosebuds and bent front. Very difficult is it to imagine fresh and fair girlhood in that crumpled pink ball-dress, or waving that broken fan. And that plum-coloured satin, gorgeous in its decay—who could believe that it was ever the garb of respectable matronhood? There are wine splashes on the skirt that tell of nocturnal revels, mirth too wild for gladness. The chance pedestrian glances at the window and hurries by with a shudder. Those tawdry garments hanging limply behind the dingy windows look to him like ghosts of the unhalloed dead.

Not thus meanly, however, thought Mrs. Gurner, the proprietress of the ladies' wardrobe, of that avocation which she had chosen for the support of her declining years. To her mind it was a pursuit at once honourable and genteel. On the gentility she dwelt with peculiar fondness. There was no counter, she remarked, and there were no weights and scales; none of the paraphernalia of plebeian trades. Plebeian trades—chandlery, shellfish, sweetstuff, and the like—might be brisker; but they were inherently obnoxious to the mind of a bred-and-born lady, as compared with the exchange and barter of second-hand garments. That species of commerce was in a manner professional. You did not even ticket your goods, but speculated your price according to the appearance or disposition—as indi-

cated by physiognomy and manner—of your customer. It was a matter, Mrs. Gurner observed, of private “contact.”

Mrs. Gurner's years had been declining for a considerable time, or rather had declined to a certain point, and there remained stationary. She had been faded and elderly when she first came to Voysey-street, nineteen years ago. She was faded and elderly still. It was believed in the neighbourhood that she had worn the same cap throughout that period—a structure of rusty black lace adorned with roses; but this was not strictly true. The substructure was possibly the same, but the flowers had bloomed and faded with the changing years; only never being new or clean, the change had not been noticeable.

“I suppose it's only natural that, having plenty of handsome clothes always at my command, I shouldn't care about 'em,” said Mrs. Gurner, in her low-spirited way; “anyhow, I don't. I should scarcely take five shillings' value off that plum-coloured satin if I was to wear it a month. Three-pennorth of benzine would bring it round again from any harm I should do it. But I don't feel the temptation. Give me my old black silk; I always feel the lady in it.”

A curious psychological fact this, tending to prove that an individual's inner consciousness may present to him an image widely different from that outward form which he wears before the eyes of his fellow-men. Mrs. Gurner, in the decomposed remains of a black-silk dress—a garment which was at once greasy, rusty, and of a dull greenish hue that suggested mouldiness, worn at the elbows, split under the arms, frayed at the cuffs, and ragged at the hem—may have felt a lady, but she certainly did not look one. But a black-silk gown in Voysey-street had a certain permanent value, independent of actual wear and tear; and as a man receiving the Order of the Bath writes himself K.C.B. or C.B. ever afterwards, so in Voysey-street a lady wearing black-silk raiment at once and for ever established her claim to gentility.

Mrs. Gurner, though she was given to speak of herself, in relation to rent and water-rate, as a lone female, was not positively alone in the world. Her son and her son's daughter shared her humble abode. The son pretended to do a good deal—he was a genius in his way, and esteemed himself, in a large measure, independent of the trammels that confine the footsteps of ordinary mankind—and succeeded in doing very little. He did, however, contribute to the expenses of the establishment in a spasmodic manner; or the establishment must inevitably have suffered that complete collapse with which it was periodically threatened by landlord and tax-gatherer. For it is not to be supposed that the profits arising out of the exchange and barter of ten pounds' worth of second-hand soft goods could

have paid for the shelter, food, and clothing of three full-grown persons.

Jarred's daughter helped her grandmother in the business and housework, waited on the lodgers, ran of errands, did whatever cleaning may have been done where everything seemed always dirty, and endured not a little reproof of a low-spirited kind, which the girl herself described as "nagging," from her elderly relative. The elderly relative "took the lead," as she called it, in the business, and cooked the viands for the family table; a work of extreme care and nicety, for it is curious to observe that people whose food is of a limited or even fortuitous character, mysterious as the provender which the ravens brought to the prophet, are apt to be extremely particular about the cooking thereof. Jarred was as keen an epicure in his way as any *gourmet* at the clubs.

That apartment which, in a more conventional state of society, would have been called the drawing-room, but which in Voysey-street was always spoken of as the first-floor front, was held sacred to the uses of Mr. Jarred Gurner. It was the most important room in the house and the best for letting, as Mrs. Gurner said, with her chronic sigh, and to relinquish it to Jarred was to relinquish a reliable source of income. But Jarred's avocations required a north light, and the first-floor front faced the north—nay, more, had a central window, which had been extended to the ceiling for the convenience of some artistic resident in days gone by, before Voysey-street had sunk below the artistic level.

Jarred was an artist, and the tall window suited him to a nicety. He was a professor of the art of doctoring pictures and of doctoring violins, and wonderful were his ways in both arts, but most especially in the latter, which is an intricate and mysterious process approaching conjuration; since, by the application of certain varnishes and a smoky chimney, Jarred could sometimes convert the most commonplace of fiddles into an Amati or a Guarnieri. He conjured a little with the pictures, too, as well as with the fiddles, and could transmute the handiwork of any out-at-elbows dauber in his neighbourhood into a genuine Teniers or Ostade, a Rubens or Vandyke, to suit the turn of the market.

Half the pictures in Wardour-street had been through Jarred's hands. The simpering, bare-shouldered, flaxen-ringleted beauties of the Lely school,—he knew them to a turn of their little fingers, the pattern of their lace tuckers; had sat staring at them meditatively many a night as he smoked his black-muzzled pipe, and wafted the tobacco-clouds across their vapid smiling faces, while he calculated the odds on an outsider or reviewed the performances of an established favourite.

Jarred had various strings to his bow. He did a little in the stock-jobbing way now and then—of course in the pettiest form—took shares in new joint-stock speculations and sold them again, or failed to take them up and defied the directors, since it would have been throwing good money after bad to set the mighty engines of law to work with a view to making Mr. Gurner keep his engagements. He had put his hand to almost everything, as he used to boast in his playful way, “from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter.” He had even done a little in the private-detective line, and although a mere outsider, had been acknowledged by some of the master minds in that noble profession to be good at following up a trail.

He was a broad-shouldered, strongly-built man, with something of a gipsy look in his swarthy face and glittering black eyes—small eyes, but with an unusual brightness that made them striking. Perhaps his gipsy life had given that cast to his features; that reckless, dare-devil turn to eye and lip, and even the crisp wave of his coarse black hair. You could have expected to meet him on a country common, with gold rings in his ears and a hawker’s box upon his back, seeking whom he might devour. There was something gipsyish in his way of living even in Voysey-street, and yet not social—a solitary Bohemian this, who liked best to take his meal by himself, at the snugest corner of his hearth, in his one comfortable chair, and to sit alone and smoke and scheme afterwards. The women of his household were a bore to him. The wretched little room downstairs, where they lived, and slept, and cooked, and ate,—the miserable make-believe parlour behind the shop, in which the bed by night vainly essayed to pass for a cheffonier by day,—was rarely honoured by his presence, and when his mother or his daughter came to his room, they knocked at the door in all humility before presuming to enter. Only when Jarred was in an especially good humour, when things had gone well with him in the City or in the betting-ring, when he had planted an Amati or a Rubens, did he deign to eat his supper with his kindred in the stuffy little chamber below stairs. Then his soul would expand over sprats or fried tripe, and he would tell them his schemes or impart his indignation against that destiny which had not provided him with unlimited capital.

“I could do anything with capital!” he would declare. “Give me a thousand pounds for my fulcrum, and I would die the equal of Rothschild.”

His daughter used to sit with her elbows on the table, although severely admonished thereupon by her grandmother, who never forgot to be genteel, and gaze open-mouthed and open-eyed upon her father.

He had contrived to instil into her youthful mind the pro-

foundest belief in his genius, even without taking any pains to effect that end; for his wild talk of his own talents, and the things he ought to have done and would yet do, when Fate should cease her opposition, was for the greater part mere soliloquy, or the letting-off of the superfluous steam which a lively imagination and an extra pint of sixpenny ale will engender in the human mind.

Louisa Gurner believed implicitly in her father, and lived in a chronic state of anger against society at large for its neglect and ill-usage of him. It seemed a hard world in which such a man as Jarred Gurner could not have place and power, carriages and horses, a fine house to live in, costly raiment, and the fat of the land for his daily provender. There must be some cog-wheel loose, some endless web out of gear, in the machinery of a universe in which Jarred had to wear shabby boots and eat scanty dinners. This feeling, fostered by the father's wild talk, had grown with Louisa's growth, and now found expression in a lurking discontent which pervaded the girl's nature, and was even visible in her handsome young face; a delicate likeness of the father's, the eyes larger and softer of hue, the mouth smaller and more refined in form, but the same dark skin and wavy black hair, the same half-gipsy look, the same defiant pride in every lineament. As the beauty of fallen angels was the beauty of Louisa Gurner; a fairness in which even admiring eyes found something akin to the diabolical. Yet, as Mr. Gurner was wont to observe in moments of good-humour, "Loo was not half a bad girl." Neither selfishness nor vanity found a congenial soil in the flower-gardens of Voysey-street. Other vices might spring up there and thrive apace; but for these delicate flowers of evil there was but scanty nutriment. Louisa, having never known what it was to find her inclinations studied or her desires ministered to, had resigned herself, even before she turned up her back hair and lengthened the skirts of her shabby gowns, with advancing womanhood, to take life as she found it. It was her lot to accept the offal as her share of the sacrifice, to sit in the most uncomfortable chair, sleep on the veriest edge of her grandmother's bed, get up the earliest in the house and go to bed the latest, run on errands in wet weather, wear her shoes long after they had ceased to be any particular use as a protection for her feet, eat the tail ends of mutton-chops and the gristly trimmings of the steak, and very often to find the guerdon of her daily sacrifice in a jobation from her father, larded with an oath or two, or an hour or so of intermittent nagging from her grandmother.

A hard life, and Loo knew it—knew, too, that she was handsomer than her neighbours, and sharper of intellect. Her glass—a sorry mirror for beauty, with the quicksilver worn off the

back in blotches, like a skin disease—told her that there was more of life and colour in her face than in the common run of faces, all more or less pinched and pallid and aged by premature cares, that belonged to the young women of Voysey-street. Nor was she often in the streets for a quarter of an hour without hearing some outspoken compliment to her good looks. But this knowledge inspired no vanity. What was the use of good looks without fine dress and a carriage?

"I think I'd as lief be ugly," she said to herself, "or liefer, for then I shouldn't be bothered or insulted when I'm out on an errand."

One solitary pleasure brightened this joyless life. When Jarred's temper had been sweetened by the prospering of some scheme, or the success of some experiment in the doctoring line, he would suffer his daughter to bring her needlework up to his room and sit there while he smoked, or varnished, as the case might be. She had her favourite corner by the fire in winter—Jarred always kept a good fire, however pinched might be the handful of coals in the shrunken grate below—her favourite seat on the window-ledge in summer, half in the room and half out of it. But only too rare were those brief glimpses of bliss, for, as it has been already remarked, Jarred kept his womankind at a distance, and Louisa's evenings were usually spent in a depressing duologue with her grandmother, whose conversation was at best a prolonged monody upon one perpetual theme—the hardness of life for the race of Gurner.

On this wet winter's night, less than a week after the little dinner in Fitzroy-square, Louisa has been allowed to bring her work up to Jarred's room, a worsted sock of her father's which she cobbles laboriously. It is the only work she is ever seen to accomplish, and it seems, to the casual observer, always the same sock, the same yawning gulf sundering sole from heel, the same dilapidation at the toe; but she plods on mechanically, and makes no moan. Not that Louisa is fond of needlework. "There never was such a poor hand as our Loo at her needle," says Mrs. Gurner, when she holds forth upon her granddaughter's imperfections. Loo has a passion for novel-reading and for music—will sit upon the ground or the fender, a slatternly crouching figure, for hours together, if only let alone so long, poring over a tattered romance, or will steal up to her father's room when he is abroad to pick out tunes, or accompany her snatches of song on the battered old piano that lurks—a convenient shelf for empty pewter pots, clay pipes, boots that want mending, and old newspapers—in one corner of the room. She is not voiceless, Loo, but has a powerful undisciplined contralto, which is the very opposite of Flora Channey's clear carol. Nor is she quite as ignorant as the majority of young women in

Voysey-street, though she has graduated only in the Voysey-street academies. She has managed to pick up some shreds and patches of education from her father—enough, at least, to teach her the sordid misery of her existence, and the bare fact that there is a higher kind of life somewhere beyond the regions of Voysey-street. She has learned to be angry with destiny for casting her lot in this back slum, and is in this respect unlike the aborigines, who talk as if Voysey-street were the world, and round the corner the edge of another universe which they have no desire to penetrate. There are dwellers in Voysey-street who hardly know what it is to turn that corner in all the days of their life. Their ambitions and desires are all bounded by Voysey-street, and the court where the celebrated pork-putcher turns his sausage-machine. If they grew rich—a contingency remote to the verge of impossibility—they would make no eager rush to Prince's-gate or Park-lane. They would only riot in the luxuries of Voysey-street; sup continually upon tender pigling; wallow in the humbler varieties of shellfish; go to a theatre now and then, perhaps, or even take an eight-hour view of ocean; but only to come back with hearts more fondly turned to Voysey-street. This is the condition of mind proper to Voysey-street—simple as the soul of the Hawaian savage, whose bread-fruit groves and coral-bound bays are all he knows of land or sea; but education had removed Louisa from this Arcadian simplicity, and to her vitiated mind Voysey-street was hateful.

She sat upon her favourite corner of the fender on this particular evening, sometimes darning assiduously, and sometimes stopping, with her sock-clad arm stretched lazily across her lap, to stare at the fire and meditate, a slovenly figure, with dark hair loose about its brow, clad in a worn stuff gown, whose original colour had been disguised by dirt until it had as much depth of tone of one of Jarred's sham Rembrandts.

A slatternly figure, but somewhat picturesque withal, needing but transference to a background of Spanish posada to be as fine a piece of colour as a picture by John Philip.

She wore a little scarlet handkerchief round her throat, which made a patch of brightness against that deeper tone, and her dark eyes reflected the firelight; a picturesque light, which brightened the pale olive skin, flickered on the full red lips, set firmly in a thoughtful mould wherein there was a shade of melancholy too much for youth, even in Voysey-street. Jarred—smoking his pipe in luxurious idleness, after a couple of hours' gluing and varnishing, which he called a hard day's work—was content that his only child should sit and stare at his fire, but was in no humour for talk, and was not going to put himself out of the way for her amusement.

"What's for supper?" he asked anon, pausing to refill his pipe.

"I think it's tripe, father."

"Think! You oughtn't to think about a fact. It is or isn't tripe. You can't think about it."

"I beg your pardon, father," the girl answered meekly; "it is tripe. I fetched it myself."

"Then I hope you fetched it double, with plenty of fat; that thin stuff your grandmother gives me sometimes is no better than stewed washleather. Hark! there's the street-door bell. Who can that be to-night?"

"Some one for grandmother, perhaps," speculated the girl.

"Very likely."

But Mr. Gurner bestirred himself nevertheless, put away a dissected violin in a convenient drawer, flung a cloth over an ancient-looking Holy Family born three weeks ago, and attaining premature age as in a hotbed or forcing-house; and having assured himself that his room was fit for the reception of a visitor, went back to his chair.

"See who it is, Loo," he said.

But before the girl could stir, the question was answered by the approach of a familiar footstep, which came lightly and swiftly up the stair, while a tenor voice, at its fullest pitch, sang the opening bars of "*La mia letizia*."

"It's Mr. Leyburne, father."

"Yes, and I haven't touched that Dutch interior of his," said Jarred, with a glance towards a corner where three or four frameless canvases were piled against the wall.

It was Mr. Leyburne, resplendent in his velvet coat, and with a lighted cigar between his finger tips, who came into the room still singing, in the primo-tenore manner, all diminuendo and crescendo, and anon, having finished his final phrase, saluted the restorer with a familiar nod.

"Well, my revered renovator, have you been baptising a fiddle with the baptism of copal and mastich, or elaborating a Raffaele? How do you do, Miss Gurner? You haven't touched that little bit I brought you, I suppose, Gurner?" with a rapid survey of the dimly-lighted room—Jarred had turned down the gas when he left off work. "Rather a tidy little bit, I flatter myself, and, unless I'm vastly deceived, a genuine Jan Steen."

"You wouldn't be likely to be deceived," said Jarred, with his plausible gipsy smile. "It isn't to be supposed you'd be taken in like some of our City customers—stockbroking gentlemen, who set up their villas at Tulse-hill and Clapham, with vineries and pineries, and so on, and want genuine Titians and Veroneses at five pound per square foot."

"Well, no, I am a little better judge than your City swell, I hope. Still any fellow may be taken in. But I think there's something good in that Dutch bit. I got it of a dealer in Long-acre; had a couple of brand-new blue-and-green landscapes in the middle of his window, and the Jan Steen in a corner, poked away anyhow behind some gimcrack Dresden china. "What do you want for that little brown bit?" said I. "Seven pound ten," said he. "Give you five," said I. "Frame's worth the money," says he, which, by the bye, is the inevitable remark of a dealer if you offer him a price for his picture. "I'll give you five, and toss you for the difference," says I. Dealer wouldn't—wished him good-morning—changed his mind and would. Tossed him for the two ten, and won the toss. And I believe he was glad to get the fiver. Turn up your gas, Gurner, and let's have another look at it."

Since his accession of fortune Mr. Leyburne had amused himself by turning collector in a small way, and had lined the walls of his lodgings with those treasures of art which he had amassed in the course of his peregrinations, and the greater number whereof he had intrusted to Jarred to clean and varnish. But he had not gone wildly to work, being a prudent young fellow enough in spite of his light-hearted gaiety, and not one of those young men to whom being left a fortune means ultimate ruin. He found a good deal of spending in three or four hundred pounds, and his chief delight was derived from the picking up of various canvases in out-of-the-way corners, every one of which, in its brief span of novelty, he implicitly believed in as an original.

Jarred knew Mr. Leyburne's ways, and as every picture which passed through Jarred's hands was worth a matter of thirty shillings to him, it may be supposed that he prophesied smooth things about these works of art, and only threw in a doubt or a rough word here and there to prove his frankness and loyalty.

The gas was turned up to its fullest—a couple of strong flaring jets, unshaded by globe or chimney—and Mr. Gurner brought the little picture and placed it on a dilapidated easel exactly under the light, while Walter Leyburne and Loo put their heads close together to peer into it. The girl had been half brought up on pictures, as it were, and had a mechanical knowledge of the various masters—that a brown-faced Madonna was a Murillo; a pallid or bluish-complexioned saint or saintess likely to be a Guido, especially if with saucer-shaped upward-gazing eyes; that sheep were never painted by anybody but Ommeganeke; that dark inscrutable pictures relieved by dabs of the palette knife here and there were Salvator Rosas; and so on, and so on, through the whole catalogue of art. The Jan

Steen was the usual kind of thing—an old woman peeling vegetables, and another old woman looking at her; still life, a brass pipkin or two, a bottle and glass on the table, a half-open door with glimpse of inner room.

"To my mind," said Walter, gazing at his picture with the fondness of a discoverer, as Cortez may have gazed at the Pacific or Columbus on the coast of America, "there's no question about that. If I were hard up to-morrow, I shouldn't be afraid of offering that picture to the National-Gallery fellows. It's worth seven hundred and fifty pounds or it's worth nothing."

"I shouldn't be surprised if it were," said Jarred; and then they both went into the picture technically, and discussed its merits in minutest detail.

"It's the detail in these things that constitutes their charm, you see," said Walter Leyburne; "there's nothing beautiful in an old woman peeling onions *per se*."

"No," replied Jarred; "if I were a millionaire like you, I shouldn't go in for old women—no, not if they were Jan Steens, or Ostades, or Brauwers. I'd hang my walls with beauty. There's that Guido, for instance—that's a picture you ought to have. I don't say so because I've got it to sell. I only wish I was rich enough to hang it up over that mantelpiece. I should sit and gaze at it by the hour together, and feel myself a better man for looking at it."

Jarred said this with a glance at a large picture in the corner—a bluish-complexioned Magdalen gazing upward, from a background of purple sky, a masterpiece which he had vainly endeavoured to dispose of for a long time.

"I don't like large pictures, Gurner, and that Guido of yours is a duffer. Sell her to one of your City men by the square foot. She'd do uncommonly well between the windows in a Russell-square dining-room."

Louisa withdrew to her corner by the fire, but not to her favourite seat on the fender, nor yet to the resumption of her darning. She sat watching the visitor as he paced up and down the room, smoking his cigar. There was little need for punctilio in this respect, since the atmosphere of Mr. Gurner's sanctum was at all times heavily charged with tobacco. Walter took the cigar from his lips every now and then to talk of art, in a wilder way than he had ever talked to his friends in Fitzroy-square, and with something less of modesty. Here indeed, in a chamber as it were sacred to the inner mysteries of art, his soul expanded, his countenance glowed with a noble fire, or a light which at least seemed noble to Louisa. He talked of himself, the things he meant to do in the future, measured himself boldly against the men who had succeeded, and declared his ability to match or

surpass their work in the days to come. His wildest talk, however, seemed hardly the boastful utterance of a shallow vanity, but rather the bold defiance which a mind conscious of latent strength hurls in the teeth of destiny.

"They may snub me to-day, Gurner," he said, "but hey shall change their note before I have done with them. Time and work, that's the motto for a man who wants to succeed, isn't it, old fellow?"

"Time and work," repeated Jarred, to oblige his patron; but had he been asked for his own specific, he would more likely have said, "Time and varnish."

The young man had been stung by the rejection of a small picture in one of the winter exhibitions. Even the consciousness of sixty thousand pounds in the Funds afforded no healing balm for that wound. It was only by a little self-assertion, by wild rhapsodies about honest work and future success, that he could find a balsam for his pain. He stopped suddenly, in the middle of a tirade, flung away the end of his cigar, and burst out laughing—at himself—in the frankest, pleasantest way possible.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed. "What a consnmmate jackanapes you must think me, Miss Gurner! Only when a fellow gives one a slap in the face like that—a fellow one can't hit again, you see—the only way one can let the steam off is in talk. I daresay the fellows who rejected my picture—you've seen it, Gurner: 'Werter's first Meeting with Charlotte'—were right enough. I shall think it a daub myself in a month's time, I've no doubt. I generally do. But if there's any stuff in me, I won't have it trodden out of me, eh, Gurner?"

"I wouldn't give the snap of my finger for the opinion of all the hanging committees in London," said Mr. Gurner, with supreme contempt. "Prejudice and self-interest and convenience are the three judges that sit upon your pictures. That 'Werter and Charlotte' was a gem—full of beauty and expression—the still life admirable—the modelling—well, there are not many young men in the Academy who could touch you there."

"Don't say another word about it," protested Walter, gratified notwithstanding. "I am a selfish fool to come here and prose about myself and my disappointments. I hope you'll forgive me, Miss Gurner," he added, with that natural graciousness which distinguished him when he spoke to women.

"I like to hear you talk about yourself," the girl answered naively.

"Do you? That's very good. I fear I must be an insufferable bore. But then you're fond of pictures, I know, and can take an interest even in a struggling painter."

"A struggling painter with a fortune at his back!" cried Jarred. "That's what I call a rum start."

"Now look here, Gurner. I'm not going to say I don't value money, for I do. I saw too much of poverty in my childhood—genteel poverty, you know, which is the worst of all—not to value good fortune. But I verily believe I could surrender all the money my uncle left me without a sigh, and begin life again a friendless lad in the streets of London, if I could paint like Etty or John Philip."

He kept his word, and spoke of his own struggles no more that evening, though he stayed late, and talked of art in the abstract a good deal, while Loo sat by and listened, and forgot for a little while that life meant only Voysey-street. He was very far away from her life, this noble young painter; but such an evening as this was an oasis in the desert of her sordid existence, and she rejoiced in the cool verdure, and quenched her thirst at the limpid stream, and put away all thought of tomorrow's waking, when there would be nothing left but sand and barrenness.

There was a warmth and earnestness in Walter Leyburne's talk at all times which made him almost eloquent, and though, perhaps, there might be little positively new in his ideas, he was so different from the conventional young man who believes in nothing but boredom, that he at least appeared original. His hair, his eyes, his gestures, were all brightness and vivacity. He was a creature all life and variety—depressed one minute, elated the next, changing with a hundred shifting shades of feeling.

"Upon my word, Gurner, there is something extraordinary in this queer old room of yours. I always enjoy myself here; I suppose it's because you let me talk so much. I came out to-night in a fit of despair—the black dog had me in his grip—and I have talked myself into good spirits. Or perhaps it is your influence, Miss Gurner," with a friendly little look at poor Loo, a friendly glance that shot straight to her heart. Can a girl of eighteen exist without admiring something? and, after her father, Walter Leyburne was the sole object Louisa had to admire.

"I shouldn't think her influence went for much," said Jarred, moodily, "considering that she sits there like a log, and never opens her mouth."

The girl coloured high at the reproof.

"I suppose it's nature's fault if I'm stupid," she said; "so you needn't throw that in my teeth, father; and I don't see that it's my fault if I'm ignorant. I'd have been glad enough to learn if any one would have taken the trouble to teach me."

This was true enough. She had besought her father, even

with tears, to help her a little out of his vast storehouse of knowledge; but Jarred was too lazy even to impart the little he knew.

"I must protest against any insulting comparison between Miss Gurner and a log," cried Walter eagerly. "It is one thing to be silent—another thing to be a log. Now Miss Gurner is an admirable listener. I don't believe I should have rambled on half as long if it hadn't been for her delightful listening. She has a rapt look which inspires one—the lips a little parted, like a statue of Wonder. I wish you would let me—I wish Miss Gurner would let me paint her in one of my pictures. I have an idea for something better than Charlotte and Werter—a subject from Boccaccio, or something in that way. May I paint you, Miss Gurner?"

"She'll let you fast enough," grumbled Jarred. "She has nothing else to do. But I don't know whether her grandmother would like it. She's precious particular in her notions, is the old lady—can't forget that she was brought up to something better than buying and selling second-hand rags."

It was as well to make a favour of the business, but Jarred, good easy man, had not the faintest objection. What if his girl—who was certainly a good deal better-looking than the ruck of girls—should captivate this young fellow, with his sixty thousand pounds? There'd be a stroke of luck. It was hardly likely, though. The girl's surroundings were too much against her, and the young men of the present day are so cool-headed and cool-hearted, so keenly alive to their own interests. No, it was scarcely within the range of possibility, thought Jarred, looking at his daughter's untidy hair, worn gown, and listless attitude. He was almost sorry he had not taken a little more pains with her. If a worn-out old violin, bought from a fiddler in an orchestra, can, by much labour and artful manipulation, be doctored into the semblance of a Stradivarius, why should not a girl like that have some capability in her that might be worth cultivation? But it was too late now; the chance was gone. There the girl was, unkempt, untaught, uncared for—a weed instead of a flower. No one but an idiot could imagine that she would have power to charm such a man as Walter Leyburne.

"Leave me to talk over the old lady," said Walter. "I have set my heart upon putting your daughter into my next picture."

The girl brightened and blushed, but said nothing. This was a kind of praise, but, O, so different from the insulting compliments that had been muttered in her ear by wandering strangers as they passed her in the street.

The painter had been struck by a sudden notion that there

was something original in the girl's face—something more than the mere pink-and-white prettiness which he could have for his model any day for eighteenpence an hour; something striking; something which—if he could only represent it faithfully—would make people stop before his canvas and exclaim, "There's a curious picture!"

"By Jove, I've hit it!" cried the painter, in a sudden rapture. "That for Boccaccio!" snapping his fingers contemptuously. "I'll paint her as Lamia."

"Lamia!" echoed Louisa wonderingly.

"Who may she be when she's at home?" asked Mr. Gurner.

"Keats's Lamia, the mysterious serpent-woman;" and then he spouted those wondrous lines:

" 'She was a Gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd at once some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.' "

"I've no objection," said Jarred. "provided you paint her here. You can bring your traps, I suppose?"

"Of course," answered Walter; "I shouldn't dream of troubling Miss Gurner to come to my rooms;" with as deferential an air as if Miss Gurner had been the daughter of a duke, who could be no more moved from her particular sphere than the stars from their orbits.

So the business was settled, Walter pledging himself to vanquish any genteel prejudice on the part of Mrs. Gurner, and the young man began to pace the room talking of his picture. It was to be a bishop's half-length; none of your cabinet pictures, all finish and namby-pambyism, but a life-size figure, the very woman as she stood before him to-night, with those dark grand eyes, that ivory paleness of cheek and brow, those full crimson lips with their perfect curve, that loose shadowy hair—the very woman, only glorified by his heart. By such a picture as this he might spring at one sudden bound into the arms of Fame. The world should find out that he had stuff in him—that he was not a mere amateur, a dabbler in art, serene in the security of a handsome income. No, Lamia should make him.

Lamia, or her representative, slipped from the room presently, unobserved, to "see to" the supper, or, in other words, fetch the beer from a neighbouring tavern, lay the cloth, dish the potatoes, and submit to a good deal of mild nagging from her grandmother.

"I may toil and slave as much as I please," wailed that victim of untoward fate, "watching the tripe till my eyes water, to keep it off the boil, but you can take your pleasure up-stairs, carrying-on with that young man, I make no doubt."

"I don't know what you call carrying on, grandma," muttered the girl, in a low dull voice that might mean either resignation or indifference; "I haven't spoke half-a-dozen words to him, and I can't see much carrying-on in that."

"If he hadn't been there, I suppose you'd have come down-stairs to help me with the tripe."

"I didn't think there was much help wanted. I peeled the onions and fetched the milk before I went up."

"You wouldn't have stayed up there quite so long for your father."

"Yes, I would," answered the girl boldly, making a little unnecessary clatter with the knives and forks she was arranging on the shrunken tablecloth, of more than doubtful purity; "I always like to be with father. He may swear sometimes, but he doesn't nag."

The matron refrained from any direct notice of this shot.

"Ah!" she said, with a plaintive sigh, "the Gurners were always ungrateful. It's in the blood, I suppose. There's your father. I may toil and moil for him from before there's a shop open in the street till hours after the last of 'em has shut, and not get a thank you, or a civil word, if he's in one of his tempers. There's my daughter Mary went off to the other end of the world directly our family troubles came, and left her mother to face them alone."

"Aunt Mary wanted to take you to Australia with her, grandma. I've heard you say so twenty times over," expostulated Loo, putting down the mustard with an indignant dab.

"Wanted me to go!" wailed the dame; "a pretty want, indeed, when she knew that going to Margate by water was a trial beyond my strength."

"You might have got over a little sea-sickness, I should think, to get away from England, after—after what you've told me," said Loo. "I'm sure I'd have gone, and gladly, though I'd had to go through fire as well as water, if I'd happened to be born in those days."

"You!" cried the elder lady, contemptuously; "*you're* made of a finer clay than a Shrubson, I daresay." Shrubson was Mrs. Gurner's maiden name.

"I've got my feelings," answered Loo, setting down the bread with a bang; "even the life we live can't quite stifle them. Hark, here comes father—and—Mr. Leyburne."

She gave a hurried glance at the dim old looking-glass over the chimney-piece, and saw her angry face and tumbled hair

with an angry feeling in her breast. Paint *her*—a creature like her—whose odious surroundings seemed to be reflected in her face? Yes, paint her, for some vile character, no doubt. The serpent-woman, he had said—something frightful, revolting. Her sharp white teeth clenched her under-lip angrily at the thought. And she had been fool enough, at first, to feel flattered by the idea that he could trouble himself to make a likeness of her. There was a little pause at the parlour door. Yes, Mr. Leyburne was coming in. She took a hurried survey of the room; so small, so crammed with furniture, so untidy; the too-obvious press-bedstead, a heap of her grandmother's garments huddled indiscriminately in a decrepit old arm-chair, of a fashion so lost in the gloom of ages, that Noah might have carried such an one into the ark for the accommodation of Mrs. Noah.

"Come in and sit down," urged Jarred at the door. "What's your hurry?"

The painter looked into the room doubtfully. It was not a nice room, but there was his *Lamia*, busy with a saucepan of potatoes. Should he go back to his own rooms and think-out his new picture with the aid of a solitary cigar, or should he stop and talk to Jarred Gurner while that versatile genius ate his supper? Jarred was an intelligent companion; there were always some stray grains of corn to be winnowed out of that chaff which formed the staple of his discourse.

"What's your hurry?" repeated Jarred. "You young fellows are always going to the Albion for tripe suppers. Why can't you sit down and eat your supper with us? The old lady there is a first-rate hand at stewed tripe."

Mr. Leyburne acknowledged a slight weakness for tripe, but tripe at the Albion—clean table-linen, spotless glass and China—was one thing; the same dish in this stuffy parlour might have a different savour. But then there was *Lamia*, and he had to conciliate the old lady. Moved by this last consideration, he took his place at the little round table, at which there was hardly room for four. But Loo did not require any supper.

"I'm not hungry, grandma," she said, in her indifferent way; "there's no use in my crowding the table."

"The English of it is she doesn't like tripe," said Jarred, with his mouth full; "I never knew a woman that did. They haven't sense enough."

Loo sat down in Mrs. Gurner's easy-chair—the antediluvian chair—after pushing its various contents into a corner. She sat and watched the little supper party, and wondered what Walter Leyburne thought of the room, and her grandmother, and their life altogether, and whether he was very much disgusted at being obliged to eat and drink amidst such surround-

ings. His manner gave no indication of such disgust. He drank the sixpenny ale, and laughed and talked with all his habitual light-heartedness, having by this time put away his disappointment at the rejection of his picture as a grief that was past and gone. That ideal picture which was to make him for ever renowned had assumed a new shape. Werter and his Charlotte might wander out into darkness and chaos, might turn their faces to the wall; Lamia should open the stubborn door of Fame's temple, that mystic portal which he had been storming for the last two years with the battering-ram of youthful energy.

Jarred, warmed by the cheque which Walter had just given him on account of the Jan Steen, was unusually brilliant. They discussed all the pictures of the year; gave each man his place, rather lower places than the public had given; pooh-poohed the critics; laughed at the mob which admires out of slavish imitation, as sheep follow the bell-wether; in short, they ran the whole gamut of that argument which is the chief consolation of unsuccessful men.

"You haven't been round here so often lately, Mr. Leyburne," said Mrs. Gurner when the conversation flagged a little, as the men moved their chairs away from the table, and prepared for their after-supper smoke on each side of the narrow fireplace, Jarred next his daughter, who sat almost buried in the shadow of the bulky arm-chair; "I began to think you had forgot us."

"Then you did me injustice, Mrs. Gurner," answered the young man in his cheery way; "I'm not in the habit of forgetting old friends, even for the sake of new ones. And I've made some new friends since I was here. Let me see, when was it?"

"A fortnight on Tuesday," said Louisa, from the corner. "I didn't know friends was made so quick."

"Good, Miss Gurner! I see you can be bitter and aphoristic when you like. Well, say acquaintance—or—no, I think we must call these friends. The circumstances are exceptional."

Jarred showed himself curious to learn the nature of these exceptional circumstances. Loo sat very still, curled up in her big chair, with her eyes shining out of the shadow.

Walter, inspired by sixpenny ale, gave full swing to his natural frankness and expansiveness, and told all that there was to be told about Mr. Chamney and his daughter. How Flora was the prettiest creature he had ever seen in his life; or, if not positively the prettiest, the most interesting, the most winning, the most lovable.

"If I were to put her in a picture, I don't suppose half a dozen people would stop to look at it," he said; "for all that's brightest and best in her beauty would escape my pencil.

There's something spiritual in her face that strikes one at the first moment; but after knowing her a fortnight, and seeing her nearly every day, I can't say where the charm lies. Is it in her soft grey eyes, I wonder, or the sweet thoughtful mouth, or the delicious smile that flashes out unawares and breaks up the thoughtful look?" This in a musing tone, to himself rather than to his auditors. "I really don't know what it is, and I won't attempt to describe her; but she is a most enchanting girl."

Loo drew herself farther back into her corner—coiled herself up in her obscurity, almost as if there had been some touch of the serpent in her nature. There must have been in her composition some latent vein of envy and all uncharitableness, some perverted feeling engendered out of poverty and wretchedness; for this praise of another's beauty stirred a sullen anger in her breast. This picture of a woman, charming alike in herself and her surroundings, wounded her as keenly as a premeditated insult. It seemed only a roundabout way of telling her how low and common and unworthy she was.

"Humph!" exclaimed Mr. Gurner, with a jovial significance. "And this young lady with the spiritual countenance is the only child of a rich father, your late uncle's partner, and you see her every day. That sounds like St. George's, Hanover-square."

Mr. Leyburne laughed in a comfortable, self-satisfied way.

"She is the dearest girl in the world," he said; "and I ought to be the happiest man in creation if I can win her. But you mustn't talk about any such thing, Jarred. I've no right to sit here and rhapsodize about her. It's all in the clouds yet awhile."

"I don't suppose it will stop long in the clouds," answered Jarred, with a faint spice of bitterness. "There can't be much reason for waiting when there's plenty of coin. It's only we poor folks who have to hang back from the church-door for fear it should prove a short cut to the workhouse. There's my girl there now, for instance," indicating Loo with a flourish of his pipe; "she hasn't a bad figure-head, and would pass muster if she was tidy and better dressed. Yet I warrant she'll have to wait an uncommon time before she finds a husband that can give her three meals a day and a house to live in."

Loo blushed scarlet at this paternal speech.

"Who said I wanted a husband, father?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Do you think a woman has nothing better to think of than husbands? I've seen too much misery come of husbands in Voysey-street. If I have to go out charing when I'm old, I'd rather char for myself than for a drunken husband, as I've seen some do in our street."

"A hard idea of life, as seen from Voysey-street," said Walter,

with his good-natured laugh. "But let us hope you may not be obliged to spend all your days in Voysey-street, Miss Gurner. There are places where all husbands are not given to drink, or all wives reduced to charring."

"What's the good of hoping it?" returned Loo, in her dreary way—a manner which was a youthful reflection of her grandmother's. "I used to hope it when I was six years old, but I left off before I was seven; and now I'm nearly nineteen, and I'm not much nearer seeing the last of Voysey-street."

"Not much nearer, so far as you know at this precise moment," argued Walter cheerily; "but the possibilities of youth are infinite. Cinderella's carriage and Cinderella's god-mother may be waiting round the corner for you. And now, Mrs. Gurner, as it's on the stroke of midnight, and I'm afraid I've been keeping you up, I'll say good-night." The elder lady's glance had wandered towards the press-bedstead lately, yearningly. "But before departing I've a favour to ask you."

The favour was Mrs. Gurner's consent to her granddaughter's sitting for Lamia; a request which the lady, although in the last stage of sleepiness, received with befitting dignity.

"Laminia!" she repeated; "I never heard of the young person. A historical character, I suppose?"

"No, not exactly historical; a character belonging to fable and poetry."

"A respectable young person, I presume? I couldn't think of my granddaughter sitting for any young person who was not a strictly correct character."

"Lor, grandma," said Loo, with a shrug, "as if it mattered in a picture! And as if anybody who saw the picture would know *me*!"

"There are plenty in Voysey-street who would know you, and even round the corner," answered the grandmother solemnly.

Walter, hard driven, and not feeling quite prepared to vouch for Lamia's unblemished respectability, argued that a fabulous young person was hardly subject to the laws that govern modern society; and that, moreover, perhaps very few people among those who paid their shilling to see the picture would have a very clear idea of Lamia's antecedents or moral character.

"There's something in that," replied Mrs. Gurner. "I have read a good deal of history in my lifetime, but I never came across this Laminia of yours."

Thus, after a little farther argument, to give due importance to the question, Mrs. Gurner expressed her willingness that the painter should bring his canvas and colours next day, and begin his portrait of the sullen-looking damsel coiled up in the big arm-chair, who evinced no personal interest in the subject.

CHAPTER VII.

"I am touch'd again with shades of early sadness,
 Like the summer cloud's light shadow in my hair;
 I am thrilled again with breaths of boyish gladness,
 Like the scent of some last primrose on the air.

But my being is confused with new experience,
 And changed to something other than it was;
 And the Future with the Past is set at variance,
 And Life falters 'neath the burdens which it has."

AFTER that quiet dinner in Fitzroy-square, at which he made the acquaintance of Mr. Leyburne, Dr. Ollivant dropped in now and then, in a familiar way, to see his old friend—indeed, in his brief and infrequent intervals of leisure, and even at times when, but for this new distraction, he would have given his hours to study, the doctor found himself drawn, as it were, involuntarily towards Mr. Chamney's house. Mrs. Ollivant perceived that the precious after-dinner hour in which she had enjoyed her son's society was now apt to be clipped and curtailed, for no stronger reason than that he had promised to go round to Chamney's. His mother felt this spoliation of her one bright hour. That after-dinner tête-à-tête by the drawing-room fire had been her daily sum of happiness. No matter even if he were sometimes silent and meditative, gazing into the fire, absorbed by thoughts unshared with her. It was all the world to have him—to be able to watch the thoughtful face, and say to herself, "This great man is my son." Now she was being gradually shorn of her privilege; the after-dinner hour was shrunken to half an hour, for, on the evenings on which he did not go out, he was anxious to get to his books a little earlier than of old, in order to make up, in some wise, for the evenings he gave to friendship.

"I should hardly have thought Mr. Chamney's society would have proved so attractive to you, Cuthbert," Mrs. Ollivant said one evening, when the doctor excused himself from going upstairs to the drawing-room at all, in order to go straight from the dinner-table to Fitzroy-square. "He appears to me a warm-hearted excellent man, but by no means intellectual, and I should have supposed him a dull companion for a mind like yours."

A dusky red glowed for a minute or so in the doctor's dark cheek as he lingered on the hearth, ostensibly to warm himself, really because he felt a little ashamed of his unfilial eagerness to be gone.

"I don't go to him exactly for companionship," he said, looking at the fire with that thoughtful downward glance of his, as of a man who lives within himself, and is always looking

inwards rather than outwards; whose eyes, except for the mere mechanical purposes of existence, are of no particular use to him. "I go because Chamney likes to see me. He is a poor creature, without a friend in England, and would feel—what is that Scotch proverb?—like a cow in a *fremd loaning* if it were not for me."

"He has his daughter's company, and that young man to whom he has taken such a fancy."

"The young man can only talk about pictures and sing duets with Flora; not much amusement for Chamney. Besides, my visits are in some part professional."

"Is he so very ill?"

Dr. Ollivant shrugged his shoulders.

"He is very far from being well, and there is no hope of his ever being better. The end may come at any moment. I want to stave it off as long as I can."

"I can't blame you for wishing to do that, Cuthbert; and I won't grumble any more even if your anxiety about Mr. Chamney robs me of your society very often. Perhaps I was just a little inclined to be jealous, for I thought it might be the young lady that was the attraction. She's a sweet girl, and I'm very fond of her, as you know; but I should like to see you look higher than that if ever you marry."

"Higher? How much higher?" he thought wonderingly. For something better than youth, and freshness, and innocence, and a modest loveliness that was better than all the splendour of form and colour that ever went by the name of beauty?

"I am not at all likely to marry, my dear mother," he answered quietly; "and Flora would as soon think of marrying the chemist who makes up my prescriptions as me. In her eyes I am a superannuated bachelor. Good-night, mother. Pray don't sit up for me. I shall go to my room and read when I come in."

Thus, between friendship and science, Dr. Ollivant fell something below his former excellence as a son.

It would have been difficult for any one familiar with his previous way of life to discover what was the attraction that drew him to Fitzroy-square. He was not particularly fond of music or of painting; yet music and painting formed the staple of the talk when Walter Leyburne happened to be spending his evening with the Chamneys, and the doctor rarely found him absent. He listened with sublime patience to Mozart and Rossini, Verdi and Donizetti, hardly knowing one master's work from the other all the while. He watched the two figures at the piano just as had done that first night. He assisted at the exhibition of Flora's drawings—she was now working

systematically under Mr. Leyburne's tuition—and pronounced upon the correct drawing of an arm, or the accurate foreshortening of a foot, and demonstrated to the docile pupil how foot or arm diverged from the laws of anatomy. Dull work enough, it might have been supposed, for a man to whom the best society to be obtained among professional classes would have been open, had he cared to cultivate society.

It had become a natural thing for him to drop in twice or three times a week, and Flora had grown delightfully familiar with him, yet had never put off that somewhat reverential feeling with which a woman of romantic temperament regards a man who is at once her superior in age and intellect. Let him come as often as he pleased, her manner always implied that his visit was a condescension. Let his conversation be of the driest subjects within the range of his knowledge, she betrayed no touch of weariness. He perceived this, and was charmed by it, yet knew only too well that her heart had its attraction elsewhere; that a certain light quick step upon the stair sent the warm blood to her happy face; the sudden opening of a door and announcement of one familiar name brightened all her being like a burst of sunshine over a flower-garden. He saw all this, and watched it, and at times taught himself to believe that it interested him only as an amusing study of character; that he could look down from the altitude of his maturer years upon these butterfly loves, and, if unable to sympathize with so light a love, could at least feel kindly towards the lovers.

Was it not, he asked himself repeatedly, the best thing that could happen in his interest? Let Mark Chamney give his daughter to this foolish young painter before he died, and, lo, all responsibility would be shifted from his shoulders. He might act as her trustee still, perhaps; take care of her fortune; and see that this careless fellow did not, after squandering his own worldly goods, despoil her of hers. But of herself, of this fair young flower which in its delicate bloom seemed like a bud that had blossomed only to wither, he need take no care. Of a charge so uncongenial to his nature and his habits he would be relieved. Yes, it would be to his advantage unquestionably that this love story, just begun, should come to a happy ending.

Yet it was worth while to glance for a moment at the other side of the picture. If poor dear Chamney, on whom the hand of doom was too palpable, should die without expressing any wish about his daughter's marriage—die before the boy-and-girl fancy had grown into a life-long love—die before Flora's heart was altogether given to this shallow lover—what then? She would be his ward. His the precious charge of her present and her future. His to advise, to dictate to even, were she inclined to any act of girlish folly that might imperil her happiness.

She would enter his house as an adopted daughter. He could picture to himself how her presence would brighten that dull home; could fancy himself finding a new pleasure in home life. The fair young face smiling at him across his dinner-table. The sweet voice singing in the quiet evenings. He had no need to be a lover of music in order to love her singing. If she had spun, the sound of her spinning-wheel would have been melody to him. He thought how he might improve her education, which was of the common boarding-school type, and enlarge her mind. How his own old love of poetry, put aside on the very threshold of his scientific education—the younger and more romantic tastes and fancies of his boyhood—might revive in this Indian summer of his life.

Not all at once did these fancies become interwoven with the very tissue of his mind, until to look at Flora's gentle face was to speculate upon the position he was to occupy towards her in that unknown future—whether she was to be his ward or Walter Leyburne's wife! Gradually and imperceptibly this new and strange influence entered into his life, changed the whole current of his thoughts, and, but for his natural strength of will, must needs have distracted him from the chief purpose of his existence—that calm and patient pursuit of science which was to lead him on to greatness. Happily he had mental force enough to supply two lives—that inner life in which a girl's image made the focus and centre of every thought, and the outer and active life in which he marched side by side with the deepest thinkers of his profession.

The dull winter days went by, slowly the fog-curtains rolled away from the house-tops, and London, which had been a kind of cloudland, where cabs and omnibuses loomed ghostlike athwart the gloom, stood forth clearly outlined in the bitter-east wind. This the cheerful citizens called spring, and congratulated one another upon the lengthening of days; in which every street-corner teemed with the primal elements of rheumatism and tic-douloureux.

Thus heralded came April, and found the Fitzroy-square household unchanged in its quiet mode of life, and waiting for warmer weather before essaying even so mild a change as a journey to some sea-coast or inland watering-place. Mark Chamney had, to the doctor's keen eye, altered for the worse during these months. He was less equal even to the small exertions of his daily life, suffered more from languor and depression, took a more gloomy view of his own case, and was more oppressed by vague anxieties about his daughter's future. But from his daughter herself he studiously concealed his condition, pretended in her presence to look hopefully at life, and in his unselfish soul was glad to find there was

another object now to divide with him her care and thought, another footstep for her quick ear to mark, another voice to bring the startled happy look he knew so well into her face. Pure and serene affection of a father which can thus calmly endure division! That very look was keenest anguish to Dr. Ollivant.

For nearly five months the painter had been a constant visitor in Mr. Chamney's house, and in all that time neither Mr. Chamney nor the doctor had been able to discover any harm in him, though the doctor's eye had been keen to mark any sign of stumbling. If he were, indeed, as the doctor affirmed, shallow and conceited, his shallowness was sparkling as the surface of a rivulet, his conceit the most inoffensive self-satisfaction that ever placed a man on easy terms with his fellow men. He was indeed a young man upon whom even small vices sat pleasantly. Carelessness, procrastination, frivolity, seemed interwoven with the charm of his vivacious manner. His carelessness was a kind of unselfishness, his procrastination a deferring of disagreeable necessities, his frivolity the natural outcome of a light heart. Mark Chamney, no habitual student of character, had taken some pains to study the painter's disposition, and after five months' intimacy had arrived at the opinion that it was a nature without a flaw.

"If he were my own son I could hardly think better of him," he said to the doctor one evening, when the usual Mozart and Rossini business was going on at the piano.

"People do not always think highly of their own sons," answered Outhbert, with his cynical air; "you don't commit yourself to much in saying that."

"Why do you always sneer when I talk about him?" asked the other fretfully. "It's rather hard upon me, Ollivant, when you know what I've set my heart upon. Have you anything to allege against him?"

"Nothing. He is very well, as young men go, I have no doubt; only, I have seen so little of the species, that I am hardly in a position to pronounce on the individual. If you put the thing home to me as a personal matter, I don't like young men; but as youth is an obnoxious phase through which humanity must pass, one is bound to be tolerant towards it. In a woman, now, I confess, youth is enchanting; like a rosebud when its petals are just opening, or a river a little way from its source. But a young man is like a young tree; an awkward slip of a sapling, in which it is hard to discover the promise of the oak. And as to what you have set your heart upon, as you say, now don't you think it might be wiser to let events shape their own course?"

"Wiser, perhaps," answered the other gloomily, "for a father

who had half a lifetime before him. I can't afford to let things take their course. I want to see my little girl's future settled, before——"

He did not finish a sentence which for his medical adviser needed no ending.

"When you came to me that November night, Chamney, and we had our first confidential talk, you said nothing of a husband; you seemed content to leave your daughter to my care. Have I done anything to show myself unworthy of the trust?"

"You, my dear Ollivant!" exclaimed Mark hurriedly. "For God's sake don't think me ungrateful! I am content to trust her to you; yes, with all my heart, as secure that you would do your duty to her as that I would do a father's duty myself. There has never been anything to weaken that first idea in my mind. When I saw your name in the newspapers, and thought over our schoolboy friendship, the notion that came into my head about you seemed like an inspiration; only when I came across this young man, and brought him here, and he and Baby seemed to take to each other—she so fond of painting, their voices harmonizing, and so forth—another notion flashed across my brain, like another inspiration. You could still be her trustee, my representative when I am gone; but if I could provide her with a husband—a husband of her own choice, mind you, not mine—the idea would be in a manner completed."

"I daresay you are right," Dr. Ollivant answered rather listlessly, as if the discussion had outlasted his interest in the subject. "The only question, therefore, that remains is whether the young man is eligible."

They said no more that evening. Mr. Leyburne and Flora left the piano very soon after this, and came to join their elders in the back drawing-room, whereby the conversation became general. Walter favoured them with a description of the works of various "ineptitudes" whose pictures had been admitted to the walls of the Royal Academy, tossed over the books upon Flora's table, and talked a little of literature in the usual young-man style; pronouncing judgment upon hoary-headed sages, and patronizing veterans with ineffable superiority. Dr. Ollivant, who was apt to grow silent when the painter talked, looked and listened, and anon departed, after his usual calm good-night.

"I lose all your nice conversation when I am singing," Flora said, with a regretful look, as she shook hands with him at parting; "but, you see, we are obliged to keep up our duets. It would be such a pity to get out of practice when we have once learned them together. But I do like to hear you talk, Dr. Ollivant, and I enjoy your visits most when we are quite alone."

"If you could be always quite alone," said the doctor.

"O, you know very well, I don't mean that. Mr. Leyburne is so nice, and has given me such help in my drawing; I can never be grateful enough for that. He has let me go into sepia at last; such a relief after that dirty chalk! Please come to see us very soon again. Good-night!"

So lightly dismissed! Rewarded for all his wasted hours—the leisure which to him was the fine gold of life—with a touch of girlish patronage; told that his grave talk was not altogether unamusing, in the absence of better entertainment. He walked homeward in the clear April night, the house-tops beautified by the star-shine, but, when near the long dull street in which he lived, went off at a tangent in the direction of Regent's Park. He was in no humour for the tranquil silence of his library—for the study that until so lately had made the brightest side of his life. He felt as if the close dark house with its narrow walls would be intolerable to him. He wanted to think out something in the free air of heaven, to walk down the evil spirit within him; that evil fatal spirit which tempted him to brood upon Flora's fair young face with a fond foolish passion, senile almost as it seemed to him, who at eight-and-thirty had lived a longer life than the common herd of men—longer in labour and science, perhaps, but in passion until now a blank.

CHAPTER VIII.

"O father, what a hell of witchcraft lies

In the small orb of one particular tear!

But with the inundation of the eyes,

What rocky heart to water will not wear?

What breast so cold that is not warmed here!"

THE Lamia picture had made due progress during the winter and spring, and, as it is almost impossible to paint a young woman's portrait without arriving at some degree of intimacy with the woman herself, Louisa Gurner and Walter Leyburne had by this time—while spring was still young and bleak and cold—become something more than common acquaintance.

Walter had worked harder than usual at this picture, and had been more constant to his first idea than he was wont to be. It was the first meeting of Lycius and Lamia, "about a

bird's flutter from the wood" near Corinth, that he had ultimately chosen for his subject—a dreamy landscape dimly shone in the mystic twilight, and only those two figures, youth and passion incarnate.

During the few sittings he had found his model curiously silent and shy, and had even begun to think she must be, as her father had hinted, a dull and stupid young person at best. She had been obedient and submissive to his orders; had stood patiently in the attitude in which he placed her; had never yawned, or shifted from one foot to the other, throwing every line of the figure wrong in an instant, as hireling models were apt to do. But for some time his little attempts at conversation, prompted by civility or even kindness, had been futile. He could obtain nothing more than monosyllabic replies or the most commonplace little remarks, which sounded like a mere echo of Mrs. Gurner.

Yet he could hardly bring himself to believe her utterly stupid. Those great dark eyes, which he strove to reproduce upon his canvas, had at times such a look of depth, as though unfathomable wells of thought and feeling lay beneath their shining surface; those lips had grave and pathetic curves, which he would have chosen for his type of passion and sorrow from all the lips in creation. Yes, there must be a soul lurking in this neglected form—a soul of wider capabilities than common sons—a mind that lacked only the light of education. He had not spent three mornings at his new picture before a new idea flashed into his busy brain. What a glorious thing it would be to illumine the outer darkness in which this poor child lived—to redeem this imprisoned soul from its bondage—or, in plain words, to educate Jarred Gurner's daughter!

If the picture were to be a success, now, it would be a generous and appropriate act to make the girl some worthy recompense for her trouble. He would owe half his fame to her peculiar beauty. He might never have thought of his subject had not her face put the Lamia fancy into his head. What recompense could be better for her than three or four years in a good school? She had talked despairingly of Voysey-street as a world from which she saw no avenue of escape. To place her in some pleasant suburban seminary—such an establishment as that of Miss Mayduke's, of whom Flora was so fond of talking—would be to rescue her at once from her sordid surroundings, to lift her out of the kennel in which she had grovelled so long. And afterwards, when her education and his patronage ended together? Why, then her future would be in a manner in her own hands. A woman with a good education may do so many things. She may turn governess or companion—there is of course a perennial demand for either article—or she may go in

for book-keeping, and earn a handsome living in some commercial establishment.

"Yes," said the painter to himself, as decisively as if he had sworn to do *this thing*, "if the *Lamia* is a success, I will give Loo three years at a good boarding-school."

It was a mere fancy of his to make the benefit contingent on the future of his picture, since he could have very well afforded to do this good work. A young man of simple habits and an income of three thousand a year has ample margin for benevolence; but an unsuccessful man is apt to feel churlishly disposed towards his fellow creatures, and Walter Leyburne felt that if the picture were a failure, his model's welfare would be a matter of small importance to him.

In the mean time, however, he found some amusement in educating the young lady himself, not according to any system or educational process known to trained instructors, but in that desultory and fragmentary mode in which the teacher follows the bent of his own mind, and seeks first of all his own amusement.

After three or four sittings Loo had brightened wonderfully; the shy restrained manner wore off. She ceased to torment herself with an angry feeling that this spoiled child of fortune must needs despise herself and all her surroundings; that he was only civil to her out of a scornful pity; that he deemed her of a different clay from that young lady of whom he had spoken with such loving admiration. He was so thoroughly kind that her rebellious heart could not long hold out against him. Her face lighted up at sight of him. Those days in which he spent all the lightest hours in her father's room—they two alone together for the most part—became intervals of happiness. It was quite a new feeling to her. Her only idea of pleasure until now had been to sit on the fender while her father worked or smoked, in those rare intervals of indulgence when this privilege was permitted to her; but even these glimpses of sunshine were apt to end in storm and darkness. Something would go wrong about the supper, or he would receive an unpleasant letter, or a call from some one to whom he owed money, and in any case would vent his ill-temper upon her. Walter Leyburne was kinder than her father at his kindest, and was never ill-tempered.

Little by little she contrived to make some slight amendment in her appearance. Her hair was better brushed, and neatly arranged in that classic style which the painter had taught her; the old green stuff gown was more carefully mended. She had an object in life, and grudged no labour to make herself decent. She had tried to extort a gown from her grandmother's generosity, a gown out of the stock; but the old lady was adamant.

"If I once allowed the stock to be tampered with, I should never know where I was," she said. "The business would go to pieces in no time. I must have a good show of variety—something to catch every eye. There's that plum-coloured satin, for instance; it's very slow to sell, but I've had a good bit of money out of that gown from first to last. Young women come in and look at it, and make a bargain about it, and agree to buy it by weekly instalments, and leave a deposit of half-a-crown or eighteenpence, and never come nigh the place again. Change their minds, I suppose, or find it's beyond their means. One middle-aged lady, in the public line, paid me six instalments as regular as clockwork, and after that never come anigh me. Such is the fickleness of human nature. No, Louisa, I will never consent to tamper with the stock. If you won't do for Laminia in your green merino, which must have cost seven-and-sixpence a yard when it was new——"

"I daresay it did, grandma; for that must have been when merinoes were first invented."

"He can go elsewhere and paint some other young woman, and pay her for her trouble, which he doesn't you," continued Mrs. Gurner, without noticing the pert interruption.

"If he doesn't pay me, grandma, he pays father plenty of money."

"That's as may be. I don't often see the colour of it. There's half a dozen rates on the chimney-piece; and if we've water for our tea this very afternoon, it's more than I expect; for the collector threatened to cut it off three weeks ago."

Though the sittings took place in Mr. Gurner's room, that gentleman was rarely present. He had made it a point that the thing should be done under his own roof—that his daughter in her dealings with this stranger should be, as it were, guarded by the ægis of his parental character, surrounded with the sacred influences of the domestic hearth; and having secured this point, he appeared somewhat indifferent to details. He was by nature an idler and a loafer, and so long as the sting of the foul serpent, poverty, pierced not too keenly, he would take his ease—preferring to roam the world at random in pursuit of stray gleams of good luck, to toiling at home at the slow drudgery of his art. Thus it happened that the painter and his model had the shabby first-floor front for the most part to themselves, and Walter had ample leisure for that educational process to which his fancy inclined. Mrs. Gurner, always a stickler for the observance of social laws as understood in the unwritten code of Voysey-street, did occasionally interrupt the sitting by a stately visit, begging to be allowed to see the picture, and favouring the painter with her ideas upon his particular work, and art in general.

"Give me the old masters, Mr. Leyburne," she would remark in conclusion, "without meaning any disrespect to you; for I make no doubt when Laminia comes out a little clearer, the picture will be very taking. But don't tell me about your Millisses, and your Belmores, and your 'Olman 'Unts. Give me the old masters. Look at the tone and the mellowness of 'em, everything subdued down into a beautiful rich brown, and as smooth as a mahogany table. Why, if you put your nose against one of them Millisses it's as rough as a gravel path, all the paint laid on in splotches and ridges, as if it had been painted with a curry-comb. Give me a Rembren, or a Vandilk; there's as fine a tone in one of their Holy Families as in a Stradivarius violin."

To such art-criticism as this Mr. Leyburne could only defer in all humility.

"I have unbounded respect for the old masters," he said; "Rubens and Vandyke were giants. Yes, Mrs. Gurner, the old masters were fine fellows. Even Sir Joshua was knocked backwards by them. He saw something in the Italian school that modern art—even his—could never compass."

Mrs. Gurner's visit generally ended in a luncheon, respectfully suggested and paid for by the painter. He would run across to the fish-shop and order a liberal supply of oysters, adding thereto a handsome allowance of Edinburgh ale from the handiest public-house; and in ten minutes or so Jarred's table would be cleared of its litter of papers and glue-pots and brushes and files and gimlets, and a gipsy kind of repast spread thereon. Loo, with that new-born instinct of hers tending towards order, contrived that there should always be a clean tablecloth ready on these occasions, even though she had to wash it in a handbasin at midnight after her father's supper.

Mr. Leyburne derived a curious kind of enjoyment from these gipsy meals—a pleasure keener than, if not so pure as, that which he felt in the Fitzroy-square dinners. Outspoken as he might be in Miss Chamney's presence, having at no time any evil thought to conceal, any cloven foot to cover with the drapery of polite language, his soul expanded yet more fully here, and Self, that agreeable creature, stood boldly forth in its brightest colours. He knew that he was admired, that Louisa believed in him as an African believes in his fetish. Little words, little looks, unconscious of their own force and meaning, had revealed as much as this, and the young man enjoyed the sunshine, without after-thought for himself or any one. He had never in his life had an after-thought. He was, indeed, serene in the consciousness of benevolent intentions towards this poor foolish child; that idea of the boarding-school shut the door upon every anxious thought. Let her worship

him a little, if she liked, in the present; the worship had already lent a new refinement to her manner, a spirituality to her strangely handsome face. She was being educated in the best possible school for a woman's progress—a school in which sentiment and sympathy eked out the words of the teacher.

Even Mrs. Gurner's presence at these gipsy banquets took nothing from their pleasantness. She was not perhaps the companion whom one would have selected for a *tête-à-tête* repast; but as a third the painter found her an agreeable study of character. She made odd remarks of the Malaprop order—warmed a little with the influence of bottled ale, and cast off that heavy burden of misery which she was wont to carry through life. She philosophised upon life—as a maze whereof the devious turnings, and windings, and unexpected no-thoroughfares had sorely perplexed her spirit. She discoursed of her own past—those natural hopes and expectations of a well-brought-up young woman which after-experience had disappointed. But of that bygone period she spoke always vaguely; and the status she had originally held, and the causes of her downfall, were alike unrevealed to the painter. Even in the most confidential moments, made garrulous with ale and oysters, she never descended from the cloudland of generalities to the solid ground of particulars.

"Life is an enigma, Mr. Leyburne," she remarked one day, with a faint moan.

"Life, madam," replied the painter, who always affected a certain ceremoniousness in his converse with the lady,—“life has been compared to a froward child, which must be rocked in its cradle, or narcotised with Daffy's Elixir till it falls asleep; a comparison, oddly enough, to be found verbatim in the works of three distinguished writers—Sir William Temple, Voltaire, and Goldsmith.”

"Ah," said the matron sententiously, "there are some children that don't get Daffy's Elixir. It's all vaccination, and measles, and rhubarb-powders for some of us."

"There, grandma," exclaimed Loo, with a shrug of her slim shoulders, "don't be dreary; Mr. Leyburne doesn't come here for dreariness."

"It's all very well at your age, Louisa," answered Mrs. Gurner, with chilling dignity; "but when you come to my time of life——"

"Which I'm sure I hope I never shall, grandma, if I'm to come to it in Voysey-street."

"You would have fallen a good deal lower in the world but for me, Louisa. The ladies'-wardrobe business was my idea. Your father wouldn't have cared if we'd sunk to chandlery and Neville's bread."

"I should have liked the chandlery better, for my part," replied the incorrigible damsel. "The trade would have been brisk, at any rate. I'd rather sell tea, and sugar, and candles, and Neville's bread, and spiced beef, any day than dawdle over old gowns and moth-eaten furs that nobody ever seems to want to buy. Yes, even if I had to serve all the small children in the neighbourhood with ha'porths of sugar-candy."

Mrs. Gurner shook her head with the shake of calm despair.

"To think that such low instincts should crop up in a child of mine," she said, "after the trouble I took to fix upon a genteel business—no counter, no scales and weights, nothing humbling to the feelings."

"No; and no till and no profits, mostly!" answered Loo.

Those gipsy banquets, however, delightful as they might be, were not quite the sweetest hours of Loo's new life. It was when the painter and she were alone together that she knew perfect happiness—a rapture of content so strange in its utter novelty. His talk was no longer mere civility, or frivolous commonplace, intended to set her at her ease with him. He talked to her now as if she were on an intellectual level with himself; opened his heart and mind; told his hopes, and dreams, and fears; the story of his past; the scheme of his future; all his wildest fancies, which shifted like the figures in a kaleidoscope, but with far more variety of form and colour, and which never repeated themselves. He would talk to her as he had never ventured to talk to Flora—with a certain Bohemian recklessness, but no shadow of evil thought. He was, in fact, not particularly anxious to retain her good opinion, as he was with regard to Flora, and he let her see odd corners in his mind, which, despite his habitual candour, he had kept hidden from the young lady in Fitzroy-square. Flora was to be his wife some day; he looked upon that as a settled question, and she had therefore something of a sacred character in his mind. Not to her could he pour out his mind in all its fulness, as he could to this quick-witted young woman in Voysey-street; who, by reason of her early-acquired knowledge of life's darker side, seemed to be ten years older than Mark Chamney's daughter.

When he fancied that she was tired of standing, though he could never extort a complaint from her, or even an admission of weariness, he would suspend his work for a little while, being perhaps somewhat tired himself, and read to her. He took some pride in his reading, and read well, in a passionate impetuous way. This began by his reading *Lamia*, so that she might understand the story of which she was the heroine. The vivid passionate verse, so new to her unaccustomed ears, seemed like enchantment. Her own reading had lain chiefly in the direction of penny numbers—pirates and bandit chiefs, and gipsy maidens,

and *tout le tremblement*. This first glimpse of real poetry—all glow, and grace, and beauty—moved her curiously. It was then that all semblance of stupidity disappeared, and Walter Leyburne discovered that his surmise had been correct. Those broad temples were the indication of a powerful mind; a mind hid in darkness, but with infinite capacity. He had that happy thought about the boarding-school at once, and determined to educate her, for her profit and his own amusement meanwhile. He read her the whole of Keats; and then, finding her delight unabated, her hunger for eloquent verse only whetted, he opened the vast treasure-house of Shakespeare. He began with *Romeo and Juliet*, which entranced her. *Hamlet* she thought dull: the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* silly, except the scenes between Hermia and Helena. She warmed to *Othello*, and wept at the overthrow of that heroic soul. *Macbeth* was like a vision of a strange world, a region of passions grander than she had ever dreamed of, and she followed every line of those vivid pictures with intensest appreciation. No young woman who had been spoon fed with “Gems of Shakespeare” at school could have warmed to that mighty voice as she did, to whom the whole was new. It seemed to her as if she had only just begun to live; or had emerged from some dark antechamber of the earth into fairy-land. What did Voysey-street matter to her now? One street was as good as another to live in if she could have such a book as that to read, and such a friend as Mr. Leyburne to guide her in this new world of light, and life, and poetry.

He let her revel in Shakespeare till she knew all the great tragedies, and then called up another and younger spirit.

“Shakespeare is too heavy for my humour this morning,” he said one day, and produced a neat little morocco-bound volume from his pocket, which he opened thoughtfully, and anon took two or three turns up and down the room before he began to read.

He read, or in part recited, the whole of the *Giaour*, without pausing for a word of criticism. It was his masterpiece in the way of recitation, and he put his heart into every line. When he stood motionless, with downward-bending eyes, and began those thrilling lines:

“He who hath bent him o’er the dead,”

the girl’s rapture broke forth in a passionate sob, but was as suddenly stifled, and she listened calmly to the end.

“That isn’t Shakespeare,” she said.

“No.”

“Nor Keats.”

“No. I’m glad you begin to discriminate the differences of style.”

"I didn't think that human beings could write like that," said the girl with a gasp. "Where is he—the man that wrote about Leila?"

"Why?"

"Because I should like to go to him, and kneel down before him, and ask leave to worship him."

"Rather a foolish proceeding, if he were alive," answered Mr. Leyburne; "but you may go and worship at his grave. He is dead."

Loo burst out crying. The nerves, unstrung by those divine verses, gave way at the thought that he who penned them was dust.

"I shall never read you anything of Byron's again," said Mr. Leyburne severely.

"What! Did he write more than that?"

"Much more."

"O, but you will read the rest, won't you?"

"When your nerves are stronger."

He brought a volume of Milton at the next sitting, but Loo looked tired after the first page of *Paradise Lost*, and confessed her indifference. She liked the "Hymn of the Nativity," however, though the classic names in it mystified her. The strong music pleased her keen ear for numbers.

Thus her education progressed with the picture. Mr. Leyburne left her his books to read at her leisure, a period only to be found after midnight; and she sat up into the small hours, when Mrs. Gurner was calmly reposing in the press-bedstead, and aroused that careful housewife's ire by an undue consumption of candle.

An education such as this—the world of poetry suddenly unveiled to an intelligence sharpened by privation and the bitter experiences of Voysey-street—effected a strangely rapid transformation in this ardent undisciplined nature. This girl's mind was empty of all those objects which distract the attention, or even absorb the mind, of the happier portion of woman-kind. Dress, pleasure, society, had for her no existence. Half the dreariness of her past life had arisen from the fact that, except cares and troubles, she had nothing to think of. Her mind was a virgin soil, ripe to receive the new seed that fell upon it—the seed of grand thoughts and of melodious verses full of deep meaning. To few other young women of nineteen could Shakespeare and Byron mean so much as they meant to this girl. She knew no bright visions outside those books. Her only knowledge of nature was derived from Regent's-park and Primrose-hill, and rare had been her glimpses even of those unremote landscapes. She had spent a summer afternoon once on Hampstead-heath on the occasion of a school-treat; but that

blissful day was long gone by, and the rural scene had faded from her memory behind the mist of years. Yet, by that normal clairvoyance of the imagination which Lord Lytton has described in one of his exquisite essays, she beheld the snow-clad mountains where Manfred held commune with the spirit-world, the old Italian garden where Romeo and Juliet wooed each other in the starlight.

By some gradual process, which he perhaps could hardly have explained to himself, the painter extended his hours of work in Voysey-street. There were days when he was not in the vein of the Lamia picture, and a young man with three thousand a year in perpetuity will hardly labour against the grain, having no need to produce pot-boilers. So on these off-days he would put his patient model into some new attitude, and begin a single-figure picture—Imogen, or Olivia, or Juliet, or the Dorothea of Cervantes, or Joan of Arc, as caprice prompted, the model caring nothing, so long as she had his company.

It is possible that Mrs. Gurner would have hardly tolerated so much waste of her granddaughter's time but for those social luncheons, which served the two women for dinners, and also on account of the more substantial aid afforded the small household by Mr. Leyburne's employment of Jarred as a picture-restorer.

"He's the best customer I've got," said Jarred to his parent; "so mind you're civil to him, old lady. I'm not sorry he's taken so to Loo, for she's improved ever so much since she began to sit to him. Keeps her hair tidier, and mends her gown. And after all—though he might be sweet upon the other one to begin with—who knows what may happen? Men's minds are changeable enough at the best of times, or there wouldn't be so many breach-of-promise cases in the newspapers."

"Perhaps not, Jarred," sighed Mrs. Gurner; "but the breachers—I mean those who break their promise—generally throw over a poor girl to marry a rich one. 'Shortly after writing these beautiful letters, full of affection and quotations from Scripture, the defendant married another lady with property.' That's how it goes in the newspapers. There's generally property with the second lady. I never saw a case where it was a rich girl left in the lurch for the sake of a poor one."

"Because rich girls don't demean themselves by bringing actions," answered Jarred; "they've got the knowledge of their independence to sustain them, and they're above the consideration of damages."

"It may be so, Jarred; but experience has taught me to look

at the dark side of the picture. I wouldn't allow Mr. Leyburne to come near the place if I thought there was any harm in him; but from what I've seen of him the babe unborn isn't more innocent."

Influenced, it may be, by some airy vision shaped out of possibilities, Mr. Gurner's soul expanded so far as to move him to give his daughter a sovereign for the purchase of a new gown.

"Never mind your grandmother's rubbish," he said, when Loo told him of Mrs. Gurner's unwillingness to "tamper with the stock." "Go out and buy some new stuff that hasn't been worn by a pack of—Lord-knows-whats," said Mr. Gurner, pulling himself up short and coining a word, "but that's clean and decent as it came from the loom."

Whereupon Louisa, enraptured, rushed off to Peter Robinson's, where she was almost overcome by the size and splendour of the place, and bought a vivid blue merino, which she cut out and half made that evening, under the indignant eyes of her grandparent.

"If you had money to spend, Louisa, I think you might have laid it out in your own family. I'd have let you had that brown poplin for a sovereign—a dress that must have cost five when it was new."

"You said you didn't want to interfere with the stock, grandma."

"Not without having some *quo pro quid* to enter in my books, Louisa; but your custom would be the same as any one else's, except that I should have given you the advantage. I've been asking five-and-thirty shillings for that poplin."

"There's wine stains all down the front breadth, grandma, and some little holes burnt in one sleeve, as if it was done with a cigar."

"You needn't disparage the dress, Louisa, because you've spent your money elsewhere."

"Besides, father told me to buy a new gown, and that's the long and the short of it," concluded Loo curtly.

The study of Shakespeare had not as yet improved or modified the familiar language of daily life.

"Perhaps, as your father is in such a generous mood, he'll be kind enough to pay the water-rate," observed Mrs. Gurner in a biting tone; "it's been standing long enough."

Mr. Leyburne was somewhat startled on his next visit by Loo's appearance in the bright blue gown. Its colour reminded him of that blue silk whose musical *frou-frou* he had heard so often in Fitzroy-square. He gave a little guilty look, and began painting with less delay than usual.

Louisa was disappointed. She had expected some praise of her new dress; not that it was his habit to pay her compliments,

only a new dress to her was so great an event that she could hardly suppose it would pass unnoticed. She placed herself in the accustomed pose, but her lower lip trembled for a moment, and she looked like a child inclined to cry.

Walter dashed into his work vigorously, but soon flagged; seemed strangely disturbed in temper, and at last flung down his brush with a muttered exclamation that might have been anything.

"It's no use," he cried impatiently; "I can't paint you in that glaring blue thing. The flesh tints are nowhere. I must have a dress made immediately—classic drapery, and so on. I can get one from a theatrical costumier."

"Don't you like blue?" faltered Louisa.

"For some complexions. Not for yours. What made you put that gown on to-day?"

"It's a new one; my father gave it me. I thought you'd like it better than that old dingy one I always wear. I haven't had a new one for two years."

A little choking sound followed the confession, and poor Loo's mortification found relief in tears. That beautiful bright blue garment which she had toiled to make in the dead hours of the night, when there was profoundest silence, save of errant cats, in Voysey-street; that garment over whose gores, and side-breadths, and placket-hole, and right sleeve and left sleeve, her puzzled brain had perplexed itself, was flouted as a "glaring blue thing" by the one person whose approbation she most desired. She had fancied that she would appear to him a regenerate creature in that new gown, like a butterfly released from the dull cocoon that had bound it.

The childish sob, the brimming eyes, touched Walter's kindly heart. He ran across the room to her, comforted her with little tender, meaningless words, and drew her towards him with a gentle brotherly caress.

"My dearest child," he said, "the dress is all that is charming as a dress. Only it kills your complexion. That pale olive skin of yours is ruined by blue reflections. Why didn't you tell me you wanted a new dress? Let me choose it for you. But I'll have the Lamia costume made at once. I must paint my drapery from the real thing—Greek robes of white cashmere, with the old key border in scarlet; just enough colour to warm the dead white, and make a vivid contrast with that inky hair."

She was consoled, but he remained none the less sorry for having wounded her. What a foolish sensitive creature she was, in spite of Voysey-street, the grandmother, the second-hand finery! A very woman, in no wise unsexed by that sharp ordeal of poverty. Until now he had shrunk from offering her anything approaching to a gift. Even his books he had only

lent her. But on the day after this little scene he sent her a parcel of silk, a deep rich purple red, the colour of Chambertin. There was lace in the parcel, soft-looking Brussels, or Mechlin, which Mrs. Gurner pronounced worth a small fortune. It was hardly the most serviceable dress that could have been given to a young person in Voysey-street, that wine-dark Naples silk, scarcely a dress to fetch beer in, or even wear sitting at one's ease in the little parlour, where all the domestic processes necessary to existence went on daily. Certainly not a dress in which to wait upon lodgers, or do the "cleaning." But, having wounded her by his unkindness, Mr. Leyburne was only eager to atone for his offence, and to his artistic mind the question of utility never presented itself.

"Dear Miss Gurner," he wrote in the brief note which accompanied the parcel, "I venture to send you a dress, which I think will suit you better than the blue. Kindly accept it, and wear it, as a proof that you have forgiven me my impertinence about the dress of your own choosing. I have ordered the Lamia costume, and shall be much obliged if you will go to Mercer's, in Bow-street, and have it tried on. I have told them you will call.—Yours always,

"WALTER LEYBURNE."

Mrs. Gurner turned over the contents of the parcel with many a moan.

"It must have cost ten shillings a yard," she said; "and there's fifteen yards, that's seven pound ten; and six yards of lace, at fifteen shillings to a pound—call it fifteen—four pound ten; twelve pounds for a dress that you can never wear but once in a way on a Sunday afternoon; and then be dressed above your station and draw down evil-minded remarks. Twelve pound would have paid a quarter's rent. What a pity he didn't give you the money!"

"Do you suppose I'd have taken money from him, grandma?" flashed out Loo, wrapping up her parcel indignantly. "You don't know how to appreciate kindness and generosity. I don't care if I never wear the dress; but I'm proud to think he thought it was fit for me, and bought me such a dress as he'd have bought for a lady."

Jarred felt nothing but satisfaction at sight of the present.

"Bravo!" said he. "Hold up your head, my girl; there's money bid for you. Who knows what may happen? I should like to have a look at that doll-faced Miss in Fitzroy-square, and see if she's as good-looking as our Loo, now that she's taken to keep her hair tidy."

Instead of being grateful for the implied compliment, the girl flamed up at this speech of her father's.

"You've no business to say such things," she cried; "you've no right to talk about the young lady that—that—Mr. Leyburne's going to marry. It's all very well for him to be kind, and to make believe to think me a lady; and I'm grateful to him for taking so much trouble. But do you think I don't know that it's all make-believe? do you think I don't know that I'm like the dirt under his feet?"

"Bless and save us!" exclaimed Jarred, "what a spitfire! Here, give me the tobacco-jar, Loo, and don't talk like a fool. The best horse will win, depend upon it; and it isn't likely I should back a strange stable, when I've got a filly of my own in the race."

CHAPTER IX.

"But life is sweet, and mortality blind;
And youth is hopeful, and Fate is kind
In concealing the day of sorrow;
And enough is the present tense of to—
For this world is, to all, a stiffish soil;
And the mind flies back with a glad recoil
From the debts not due till to-morrow."

RETURNING spring, the earliest chirp of blackbirds in the squares, the carol of a wandering lark that has strayed as far from dewy cornfields as St. John's Wood, a basket of primroses bawled in the dusty street, will awaken in most bosoms a sudden yearning for the country. London is all very well, be the square Grosvenor or Fitzroy, while we can draw our curtains, and light our gas, and call it luxury. London looming through the fog, with street-lamps gleaming redly, has a sort of gloomy picturesqueness, like that under-world through which Virgil cicerones Dante; but London when skies are blue, and the hawthorns abloom in Twickenham meadows, be it ever so dear to the darlings of fashion, is apt to pall upon that less-favoured race which hath no fellowship with the children of Belgravia to whom the crowd in Hyde Park at sundown is "but a gallery of pictures." Thus, perhaps, arose in Flora Chamney's breast a new desire for fairer scenes than are to be found within the four-mile radius. A dinner at Richmond, to which Dr. Ollivant and Mr. Leyburne were doth invited, served to sharpen this hunger rather than to appease it.

"It's so nice of you to bring us down here, papa darling," she said in her fond way, as they sauntered along the walk that leads to Thompson's favourite seat, and Earl Russell's rustic cottage, while the marmitons of the Star and Garter stewed eels and larded sweetbreads for their delectation; "but it only makes me long all the more for the real country. This path and that landscape are ever so beautiful; but I think I can feel London in the air. My eyes are not so sharp as Henry the Eighth's when he stood on that little knoll yonder, and watched for the hoisting of the standard that was to tell him poor dear Anne Boleyn's head was cut off—that's historical fact, isn't it, Dr. Ollivant? I remember reading it at Miss Mayduke's. But my sense of smell seems to tell me London is very near."

"I should think, if you smelt anything, it would be the dinners cooking at the Star and Garter," said Dr. Ollivant.

"Come now, papa, when are we to go to the real country?"

"I suppose that means Brighton or Scarborough," said the doctor.

"It means nothing of the kind. It means some wild lonely place, where papa and I could wander about as we pleased, dressed anyhow, and where I should never feel ashamed of that old Panama hat papa was so fond of wearing last summer. A place where our friends could come to see us if they pleased, and where there would be the sea and boats, and where I could sketch from nature all day long, if I liked. There must be ever so many such places at home and abroad; abroad would be best, for I do so long to see some strange new world, where the common people look like peasants on the stage, and where there is a background of blue mountains, and vineyards, and broad winding river, such as one sees in a drop-scene. Now, dear Dr. Ollivant, please take my part. You know you told papa travelling would be good for him."

"Did I?" asked the doctor absently. "I forget."

"Do you really? How strange! Why, it was your own suggestion, one evening in Wimpole-street; the very first evening we ever spent there."

"I may have said so. But travelling on the Continent is hardly the kind of thing I should recommend to your father just now. He wants repose." The grave professional look travelled slowly to the figure beside him. "An English watering-place might be beneficial, if he liked the idea."

"I like any idea that my little girl likes," said Mark Chamney. "If she has set her heart on the Continent, we'll go on the Continent."

"No, no, papa," cried Flora hurriedly, and with a sudden subdued look in her face, as of one to whose mind some grave sad question had newly presented itself; "no, we will only go

where it is best for you. Advise us, Dr. Ollivant. Would it be best to stay at home—would the fatigue of a journey hurt papa?"

"I believe not. Indeed, I think change of air and scene would be good for him."

"Then I will go anywhere you please, papa," said the girl, more fondly than ever, with anxious eyes lifted sadly to her father's face and one little hand clinging to his arm. A pretty picture of purest womanhood, and grace more sweet than beauty, yet one that escaped the painter's errant gaze. He was looking across the landscape, dreamily, into the dim blue distance beyond the winding river.

"In that case we'll go to Branscomb. It's the only English watering-place I know or care about. You must remember Branscomb, Ollivant; the place we used to go to when we were boys."

"I have a faint recollection of spending a day there once, and of universal dreariness."

"Dreariness! with the sea at your feet? Why, man, there is an everlasting beauty in that which is independent of all the petty prettiness of the land. Set me face to face with the sea, and I don't care what barren rock or parched and sandy waste you give me to stand upon. But if Branscomb is rather a dull, out-of-the-way place, the country round is beautiful. I doated upon Branscomb when I was a boy; perhaps the happiest hours of my life were the long sunny days I spent lying on the beach or shying pebbles at the seagulls."

"Pray let us go to Branscomb, papa. I shall love to see the place you were so fond of," cried Flora, brightening with her father's eagerness. He could hardly be so very ill as she had feared just now from that strange grave look of the doctor's, for he spoke as if there were still pleasures worth living for—as if the warmth and gladness of life were still aglow in his breast. "You'll come to see us at Branscomb, won't you, Mr. Leyburne?" she said in a gayer tone to the painter. "I don't think you'd be deterred by a long journey."

She thought that in those hansom cabs of his, the sound of whose swift wheels and banging of whose doors so often startled her, he must every week travel the distance between London and Edinburgh.

"I beg your pardon," said Walter, newly awakened from his reverie. "Who's Branscomb?"

Everything had to be explained to him. He had evidently heard nothing of the conversation for the last quarter of an hour.

"You must come to see us in Devonshire, and teach me to paint the sea. I shall be sketching nearly all day long."

He would be delighted, of course, not that the sea was in his line, but he would give her such help as he could, directly he had finished a picture he had in hand.

This was early in May. Mr. Chamney and his daughter had not yet been to the Royal Academy.

"I thought your important picture was to be finished and sent in last month," said Flora.

"No. I did think of sending it in this year; but I have been lazy. The picture is only half-finished. I didn't want to scamp it, you see, and I couldn't get a model I liked for one of my figures."

"I'm so sorry. I was looking forward to seeing your picture at the Exhibition. Then there is nothing of yours, I suppose," she concluded regretfully.

"Yes. I sent a trifle by way of an experiment; and for a wonder it was accepted. Skyped, of course, but it is something to get in."

"O, please tell me all about it."

"There is little to tell. It is only a single figure. You might go through the rooms half a dozen times without noticing it."

"I couldn't," said Flora naively; "I should know your style. But do tell me the subject."

"I call it 'Esmeralda'—Victo Hugo's heroine, you know. A solitary figure crouching against the dark wall of a mediæval prison. A pale despairing face looking out of dense shadow."

"It must be grand," said Flora, enraptured.

"Only to the friendliest eyes. One of the weekly papers said my flesh-tints suggested putty, and my shadows were a reminiscence of pea-soup."

"Wretch!" cried Flora; "envy, of course. Why do they allow disappointed painters to turn critics?"

"It isn't fair, is it? Though, for that matter, I should like to walk into some of the exhibitors myself."

Everything was decided by-and-by, after dinner. They dined in the old coffee-room of the old Star and Garter, which most of us remember so well, and in which so many of us have dined in days that are gone and with friends that are dead. They dined in the broad bay window overlooking that fair valley through which Thames winds his silver ribbon; now making a gentle bend around the classic groves of Ham; now dividing his watery arms to embrace the willow-wooded islet. In this old window they sat while the twilight deepened, planning the Branscomb expedition; Mark Chamney full of talk, Flora animated and happy, Dr. Ollivant more cheerful than usual, only the painter thoughtful, leaning across his folded arms, with those dreamy eyes of his fixed on the fading landscape. Flora stole a glance at him now and then, and wondered at his

unwonted silence. But then, she reasoned, it is in the nature of artists to be thoughtful when face to face with nature. Even that familiar landscape, which every cockney knows by heart, but which of its kind is matchless, might mean inspiration for him.

"I think I'll come with you," said the doctor, "if you've no objection. I haven't had a holiday since I came from the Continent, except to run across the Channel to hear a lecture, or see an experiment now and then in Paris, and you can hardly call that recreation. I shouldn't wonder if I want a little of that complete repose I am always recommending to my patients."

"O, do come, Dr. Ollivant!" exclaimed Flora, delighted. "I never thought of asking you, knowing how precious your time is. But it would be so nice to feel you were taking care of papa. Not that he really needs much care, except mine, I hope," with an anxious half-appealing look, as much as to say, "For pity's sake, tell me that all is well."

"No, Baby, I couldn't have a tenderer nurse than you," answered the father, drawing the slight figure nearer to him in the friendly twilight. "And so long as I live your care shall make me happy. Only remember, darling, the best-made machinery will wear out sooner or later, and perhaps some of the strongest may break down all at once, like that wonderful one-horse chaise we were reading about the other night."

"Papa, papa!" with a burst of tears, "how can you speak lightly of what would break my heart!"

"Why, Baby! as if I were an oracle, and knew all the ins and outs of destiny. Come, Flo, cheer up, and let us talk about Branscomb. I'll telegraph to a house agent at Long Sutton to-morrow morning, and tell him to go over and find us lodgings, or a house, and we'll go down the next day. You'll go with us, won't you, Walter? My little girl must have gayer society than two old fogies like Ollivant and me."

The doctor laughed, that low but somewhat bitter laugh of his, so subdued as hardly to have offended Lord Chesterfield.

"One of the penalties which Science inflicts on her votaries," said he, "to be set down as an old fogy at eight-and-thirty."

"You are very kind," answered Walter, coming suddenly to life again, as if out of a mesmeric trance; "but I don't think I could leave London at so short a notice, even for the pleasure of accompanying you and Miss Chamney; and I need hardly say what a temptation that is. I've so much work in hand."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Chamney, "as if a young fellow in your position need care about work."

"It's foolish, perhaps, but I've set my heart on making some shred of reputation. If you'll allow me to follow you in a week or so, I shall be very glad."

"As you please," said Mr. Chamney, piqued; and so the matter ended.

It seemed strange to Flora that there should be any hitch in her programme. She had been accustomed to find the painter a willing slave, not that she had tried him by any means severely, for the ways and works of coquetry were unknown to her simple soul. But until lately he had hung upon her words as if they were of supreme importance to him, and had been studiously attentive to her slightest wishes. Of late, within the last few weeks at least, there had been a change too subtle for her to understand, far too indefinite for her to complain of, even in her own thoughts, but just sufficient to steal a little of life's sunshine from that lot which had seemed to her so perfect in its full measure of happiness.

"I thought I was almost the happiest creature in the world," she said to herself; "but then I counted him as part of my happiness. If we should have been mistaken after all, papa and I, and he doesn't care for me—never did care for me any more than for any other girl in whose father's house he might like to spend his evenings!"

The mere suggestion was appalling. How foolish she had been to think of him as she had thought, to reckon his love in the sum total of her happiness! It was her father's fault, no doubt, or the effect of that pleasant easy-going friendship between these two young people—drawing-lessons, delicious dabbings with the brightest colours Rathbone-place could furnish, duet-singing, voices blending in dulcet harmonies, a similarity of tastes that seemed to mark them as those twin-born beings parted in some ante-natal phase of existence, and only perfect when reunited. She had taken it for granted, ever so long ago, that he loved her, and that the shred of reputation he talked of with such proud humility was to be a crown of wild olive laid at her feet. Yet, chilled by this indescribable change in him, and brought face to face with stern reality, what foundation had she for the fabric of her dream-palace? Those thrilling smiles and looks of his, words and whispers that had sunk into her inmost heart, the fond clasp of his hand at parting, the lingering talk on the half-lighted staircase when he was going away—these might mean nothing after all, might only be the small change current in that society of which she knew so little, mere counters, made for show, and worthless as withered leaves.

"If he doesn't come to Branscomb I shall know he doesn't care for me," thought Flora, as they drove back to London in the clear spring night.

They had not gone far before the painter threw off his thoughtfulness like a garment, and began to talk with his accus-

tommed gaiety. He was, indeed, gayer than usual, with a vivacity that bordered on boisterousness; and Flora's doubts and fears vanished like "snow-flakes in the river."

CHAPTER X.

"You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave,
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire."

It was not quite ten o'clock when they arrived in Fitzroy-square, so Mr. Chamney insisted upon taking both his friends up to the drawing-room for the doch-an-dorrach, or parting cup, which in this instance took the shape of brandy-and-seltzer. He was tired, and flung himself at full length on a capacious old sofa; but was not too tired to ask for one of his favourite songs.

"Give us the 'Land of the Leal,' Flo," he said; and Flora went to the piano obediently, and began those pathetic words of Caroline Nairne's. But half-way in the second verse she broke down suddenly and burst into tears.

Walter was by her side in a moment, bending over her tenderly, asking if she were ill or tired. Her father looked round wonderingly.

"Why, Baby, what's the matter?"

She took no notice of the painter's solicitude, but left the piano and knelt down by her father's sofa, and put her arms round his neck.

"Forgive me for being so foolish, darling," she said, in lowest tones, meant for his ear alone; "but I can't bear any song that speaks of parting. You won't leave me, will you, dear? You'll take care of yourself, and get strong and well and never leave me?"

He took her to his heart and kissed her fondly.

"May God be merciful to us, my dearest, and lengthen our days together!" he said gently; "I will do nothing to shorten them. And now go up-stairs, dear; you're tired and a little out of spirits. Yet you were so gay coming home from Richmond."

"Yes, papa; I forget sometimes. But that song put a sudden fear into my heart. Very foolish, wasn't it? A song about a poor old man, who was between seventy and eighty, I daresay. As if that had anything to do with you, who are in the prime of life."

"It was very foolish, Baby! and you've fairly earned your pet name. Now, wish our friends good-night, and go up-stairs to bed, dear; I'm sure you're tired."

The two gentlemen, who had been discreetly preoccupied during this little dialogue,—one in looking at the slumbering canaries, the other turning over the leaves of a music-book—now emerged from their abstraction and bade Flora good-night, each after his peculiar fashion—Mr. Leyburne with a lingering tenderness, which had yet something doubtful and undecided about it, as if he could hardly trust the blind impulse of his heart; the doctor with thoughtful gravity, detaining the little hand for a moment while he put his finger on the slender wrist.

"A shade too quick," he said; "but a night's rest will set you up again. Change of air will be very good for you as well as for papa."

The doctor left immediately, and Walter went out with him. The square would have been empty of human life but for one solitary figure standing by the railings, looking up at Mr. Chamney's house. Dr. Ollivant stopped to look across the road at this lonely wayfarer.

"Curious," he said; "she looks as if she were watching Chamney's house."

She moved away as he spoke, and walked towards the other side of the square.

"'One more unfortunate,' I suppose," said the doctor with a sigh; "but she really did seem to be watching the house when we came out, didn't she?"

"Upon my word, I didn't see her," answered Walter hurriedly.

"Then you must have been looking up at the stars, for she was standing exactly opposite. Good-night."

"Good-night."

They were at the door of Mr. Leyburne's abode by this time, and here parted with no remarkable warmth of feeling. Walter put his latch-key in the lock, but lingered a little over the operation, long enough to allow the doctor's upright figure to vanish from the square—and then put the key back into his pocket and hurried off in the direction taken by the girl. She had not left the square. He found her standing by the railings on the other side, her face almost hidden by a thick black veil tied tightly across it. He knew her, however, in spite of this disguise.

"Loo!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here, child?"

"I don't know—nothing! I was miserable at home, so I came out for a walk. One may as well be miserable out of doors as in that stuffy room with grandma. I knew very well where you'd be, so I went to look up at the windows—for company."

"Poor Loo!" with infinite compassion. "Why, the books I lent you would have been better company than that!"

"Yes, if I could only read them. But I can't—at least not till grandma's gone to bed. It's a crime to open a book in her opinion. I sit up till three in the morning sometimes reading, though. I think I know the *Bride of Abydos* by heart. But even then I get bullied about the candle being burnt out."

"I wouldn't say bullied, Loo. It's out of harmony with feminine lips."

"Pitched into, then."

"Worse and worse. Isn't it just as easy to say scolded?"

"I daresay it is; but it does me more good to say bullied. I do get bullied, nagged at and bullied from morning till night. Is it my fault if things are dearer than they used to be, and taxes higher? I'm sure I'm treated as if it was."

The old heaven would show itself sometimes in this poor Louisa, despite of the refining influence which had wrought so swift a change. Her mood to-night was not the softest. She knew that she was sinking back into the old lowness, for which she had hated herself and her surroundings even to loathing; but there was a sullen anger in her heart just now which made her indifferent to her own degradation. What did these small distinctions of language signify? She could never be a lady. In the good old days of the slave-trade it mattered very little to one of that subject race which shade of blackness his visage wore. There were no degrees of bondage. Under that hateful law every colour counted as black. So with Louisa's slavery to the bond-master Poverty. Of what use were her dim aspirations for refinement when she knew herself without the pale?

"What's the good of telling me not to use vulgar words?" she asked sullenly; "I should never be like *her*;" with a jerk of her head in the direction of Mr. Chamney's abode.

"You might be a very superior young woman for all that," replied the painter, not disputing her proposition; "you've brains enough for anything. Come, Loo, I'll tell you a secret. We'd better walk towards Voysey-street, though; it doesn't look well standing about here."

"As if looks mattered for such as me."

"Your favourite Byron would have said 'such as I'—am understood. I don't know what's amiss with you to-night, Loo; you're not like yourself."

"Yes, I am; more like myself than I've been for a long time. I've been trying hard to be like some one else. Not *her!*" with another jerk; "for of course *that's* impossible. Such as me—I—can't be like perfection. You might as soon wash negroes white—real negroes, not Christy's. I did try to grow a little better, though; but to-night I had a fit of unhappiness—or wickedness—I don't know which, for in me they seem almost the same thing—and I came out of doors to get out of myself if I could."

"Poor Loo!" murmured Walter, in the same compassionate tone, as gently as if he had been trying to comfort a fretful child. "Poor foolish, impatient Loo! Come, now, it's time I told you my grand secret."

"That you're going to be married soon, I suppose?" she said. There are women who—in such moods as this woman was now in—take a savage pleasure in saying things that hurt them.

"Nothing of the kind—I—well—to tell you the truth, I've been a little unsettled in my ideas of matrimony lately. Yet Flora is the sweetest girl in the world. To deny that would be a kind of treason. Only you see a man has to discover whether a particular kind of sweetness suits his particular temper, and to be very sure that the honey never could cloy. Some men even like their honey with a dash of vinegar in it. In short, I have a disagreeable knack of not knowing my own mind."

All this was said with as much freedom and frankness as if he had been talking to a young man instead of to a young woman.

"What is your grand secret, then, if it isn't that?" asked Loo, still in a sullen tone.

"Why, it's about you, my dear Louisa. Ever so long ago, very soon after I began the 'Lamia,' I determined to make you some little recompense for your kindness in sitting to me."

"My kindness!" echoed the girl scornfully. "As if it wasn't pleasanter to me to sit and hear poetry than to scrub floors or run errands."

"I'm glad it wasn't unpleasant; but still it was a kindness to me all the same. I made up my mind I'd do something; and when I found out what a clever girl you are, I said to myself, the something shall take the form of education. If the picture succeeds—it was a fancy of mine to make it contingent on the success of the picture—I'll send Loo to the best boarding-school I can find, for three years; at the end of which time she'll be a well-educated young lady, and able to get her own living in a ladylike manner. Young women are not at a discount as they used to be; there are telegraph-offices and houses of business, and goodness knows what, open to the weaker sex nowadays.

Well, the picture hasn't succeeded yet; in fact, it has not been sent in. But the 'Esmeralda' for which you sat is the first picture I've ever had hung, and it's been well spoken of in half a dozen newspapers. So you see you've been lucky to me after all, Loo."

"I'm glad of that," she said in a softer tone.

"Therefore, as delays are dangerous, I've resolved to finish the pictures you're sitting for as fast as I can, and make immediate arrangements for sending you to school."

To his surprise and consternation the girl shook her head resolutely.

"I won't go to school," she said; "it's very good of you to think of it, and I'm grateful. But I don't want schooling. You couldn't school me into a lady; and as for being a governess, I couldn't sit quiet to teach children grammar and geography if it was my only chance of escaping starvation. I'm pretty quick at figures, and I could learn anything I should want to know for a house of business in a quarter's evening school—at Mr. Primrose's in Cave-square. I think, though, I'd rather emigrate when you've done your pictures. I had an aunt that went to Australia, and I've sometimes thought of getting away from Voysey-street and grandma's worrying by going off like her."

Walter Leyburne shuddered. Here was a strong-minded young woman for whom he could do nothing—a young woman who could calmly contemplate a solitary voyage to the Antipodes.

"I can't tell you how you've disappointed me," he said. "Do think it over quietly, and try to see the question in a different light. Consider all the advantages of education."

"What could it do for me except raise me above my station?" asked Loo moodily; "and make me hate Voysey-street just a shade more than I do now. It wouldn't give me a new father—not but what I'm fond of him as he is—or a new grandmother. It wouldn't make me more on a level with your perfect young lady in Fitzroy-square."

"How you harp upon her, child! Why, education would raise you to her level! It is only education that constitutes her present superiority. Her sweetness is the sweetness of a refined nature which has never been degraded by vulgar associations."

"But my nature has been so degraded," replied Loo quickly. "You couldn't wash the vulgarity out. Laying English grammar and French, and music and drawing, and the use of the globes, over the degradation wouldn't be much use. It would be like father's varnishing a bad picture—the picture may look a little better, but the bad drawing and the false colour are there all the same."

"You talk like a philosopher," said the painter, somewhat offended that his benevolent instincts should be thus thwarted,

"and I bow to your superior judgment. I will say no more."

"Now you're angry with me," cried Louisa, quick to hear the change in his tone; "but indeed I'm not ungrateful. I should be so, if I let you waste your money in trying to do something that can't be done. As for education," she went on with a sardonic laugh, "rely upon it that's a luxury thrown away upon people of our class. I can just read and write and cast up a bill for grandma, and hold my own against the milkman when he wants us to pay for ha'porths we haven't had. That's enough for me. I don't suppose I could be fonder of Shakespeare and Byron than I am, if I'd had ever so good an education."

"Perhaps not; but you'd have a more critical appreciation of both."

"That means that I should find out their faults. Then I don't want to be critical."

"What a tiresome obstinate girl you are!"

"O, you can't lift me out of the mire; I was born in it. You've changed my life for a little time, and brightened it; but when the pictures are done, good-bye to the brightness. You'll have done with me."

"Done with you! Now, Loo, is it kind to talk like that, when I want to be your true and loyal friend—as true to you as if we had been born brother and sister? The misfortune is, that the abominable laws of society—made, of course, to restrain miscreants—give so narrow a scope for friendship between a man of my age and a girl of yours. If you won't let me send you to school, I don't know that there's a single thing I can do for you to prove my friendship. I give you my honour I was thinking about this very subject at Richmond this afternoon."

"At Richmond!" exclaimed Loo. "You had been to Richmond with them, then? I saw you all get out of the carriage."

"Foolish girl, to waste your time watching other people."

"Richmond! that's a pretty place, isn't it?"

"Rather," replied the young lord of the universe, secure in the possession of an income that would allow him to range the world, from one garden of enchantment to another, and not disposed to be rapturous about a London suburb. "Yes, it's a niceish place. Haven't you been there?"

"I've never been anywhere, except to Hampstead Heath once, and to the Forest."

"What Forest?"

"Epping. Are there any other forests?"

"Any other forests! Poor child! To think that this world is so beautiful, and you have hardly seen anything outside

Voysey-street. Let the usages of society go hang! I'm not a ruffian, and I won't be fettered by them. Do you think your grandmother would let me take you for a day in the country, Loo? I could get a dog-cart from the livery-stables, and I'd drive you down to some nice little village by the Thames—Shepperton or Halliford, or some such place. I'd ask the old lady to go with us; only I'm afraid she'd be rather a damper."

"She would," said Loo candidly. "She always is a damper."

"Do you think she'd let us go?"

"I don't know. Perhaps if you asked her she might."

"Then I'll propose it to her to-morrow, after we've had a snack of some kind and a bottle or two of Edinburgh. Would you like to see the hawthorn hedges, and the river, and the reedy little islands, eh, Loo?"

"Would I like! What have I ever seen of the country, or of anything that's bright and pretty? It would seem like being in heaven. I always think the great beauty of heaven must be that it isn't like Voysey-street."

They were in the much-abused Voysey-street by this time, and encountered two or three slipshod specimens of the genus girl, fetching supper-beer. The chandler's shop was only just shutting; it was the noon of night at the shell-fish merchant's. They parted at the door of the ladies' wardrobe, Walter pledging himself to obtain Mrs. Gurner's permission for that holiday beside the winding Thames.

"You haven't any idea how jolly the river is, when you get high up towards Windsor, above the locks," he said, and bade Loo a kindly good-night. The promised pleasure had restored her spirits. Her eyes—those dark inscrutable eyes—had brightened; her whole aspect improved. Yet at the last she flung a random shot.

"What will Miss Chamney say if you take *me* out?" she said.

"It cannot make the slightest difference to Miss Chamney," he answered stiffly. "Good-night."

The lifted hat, that dignified farewell, sent a chill to Loo's impatient heart.

"What's the good of my wearing myself into a fever about him?" she said to herself, as she went through the dark little shop, into the airless parlour, with a tolerable certainty of being "nagged at" for her untimely absence. "What am I to him, or he to me? There's nothing in nature farther apart. His kindness to me is only charity. I almost hate him for it."

Yet she did not hate the idea of that day in the country, but yearned for it with a longing that was akin to pain. To be with him for a whole day, away from all the sights and sounds of Voysey-street—from the dirty room reeking with stale tobacco,

the slatternly grandmother in her greasy black silk gown, the sordid misery of her daily life; to escape from these things but for a few hours, and to be with him! Was it any wonder that she sickened at the thought of disappointment?

CHAPTER. XI.

“’Twas one of the charmed days
 When the genius of God doth flow—
 The wind may alter twenty ways,
 A tempest cannot blow :
 It may blow north, it still is warm ;
 Or south, it still is clear ;
 Or east, it smells like a clover farm ;
 Or west, no thunder fear.”

MRS. GURNER, conciliated by a Melton Mowbray veal-and-ham pie, washed down with copious draughts of Edinburgh ale, proved more tractable than might have been expected. She did not forget that dignity which was the strong rock of her life. She dilated upon the impropriety of a young gentleman giving a young lady a day's outing, unless those two young people were specifically understood by their circle of friends or acquaintance to be “keeping company.” She had seen enough of good manners, before her misfortunes reduced her from the sphere in which she had been born and brought up, to be fully instructed upon this point. People who were keeping company might go where they liked ; people who were not keeping company must defer to the prejudices of a too censorious world.

Walter reddened a little at these remarks, while Loo frowned and bit her nether lip, and tried to tread upon her grandmother's foot under the table.

“Never mind the censorious world, Mrs. Gurner. I hope you know that I'm not a scoundrel.”

“I have always found you in every respect the gentleman,” said the old lady, pouring out a final tumbler of Younger's Edinburgh.

"Then you may feel sure that your granddaughter will be safe in my care. I only want to give her a few hours' fresh air. See how white she looks."

"I feel the want of fresh air myself," said the elder lady, with a faint groan; "but no one troubles themselves about *my* looks."

Walter felt uncomfortable.

"I'm sure, my dear Mrs. Gurner, if you'd like to go with us—" he began, making a desperate offer. It would be fearful to have that old woman beside him in the dog-cart: and he could hardly put her on the back seat, with the possibility of her being jolted off and flattened upon the pavement. He wanted to be alone with Loo. He wanted a long sunny day in the rural lanes, sheltered by elder and hawthorn, beside the winding river. He wanted to talk of Shakespeare and Keats and Byron, pictures, his hopes, his future—all those subjects which this poor uneducated Loo seemed to understand even better than Flora Chamney.

Happily Mrs. Gurner had mercy on him.

"No," she said; "two's company. I should only be an encumbrance. Besides, I've had so little fresh air of late years that it might turn me giddy. Let her go; let her enjoy herself; youth's the time for happiness." This with a dismal sigh.

The consent was yielded, however, and that was all Mr. Leyburne cared about.

"If it's a fine day to-morrow I shall call for you at eleven o'clock," said Walter.

Loo tried not to look quite as delighted as she was. After all, she kept saying to herself, his kindness was only pity.

Walter went away curiously pleased at having gained his point. The idea of to-morrow's holiday elated him. He was surprised at his own gladness.

"There's something so fresh and original about her," he thought. "I suppose that's why I like her society so much. Or is it because I ought not to be so fond of her company? ought not to have a thought for any one except that dear little Flora, who seems to have been created on purpose for me? I wonder how it was Eve listened to the serpent? Was it out of sheer perversity, or because Adam was rather a dull companion?"

The next day was glorious, balmy, midsummer-like; a day which raised Walter Leyburne's spirits to their most joyous point. The ostler from the livery-stables had the dog-cart ready for him when he went into the yard. He had been artful enough to go to the yard for that vehicle, rather than have it brought to his door in Fitzroy-square. He saw no actual

wrong in what he was doing; but it seemed to him just as well that neither Mark nor Miss Chamney should know anything about this little excursion.

He drove briskly round to Voysey-street, astonishing the gutter children by the splendour of his appearance, in light-grey dust-coat and white hat. Loo was ready. She had put on her claret-coloured silk, his own gift, to do him honour. A black-lace shawl, the loan of which Mrs. Gurner had on this occasion conceded, draped her sloping shoulders, a little black-lace bonnet, ingeniously constructed out of odds and ends, perched coquetishly upon her raven hair—hair which was plenteous enough to need no help from art—her father, who knew of the intended excursion, and expressed no disapproval, had given her three-and-sixpence for a new pair of gloves. The result was satisfactory, and Miss Gurner looked remarkably handsome—so handsome that Walter was almost startled.

"Why you look better than 'Lamia!'" he exclaimed; "and I thought I had you there at your best. There's more life, more colour. I suppose it's because you look so happy. Poor child, to think that the prospect of a drive in the country can give you so much pleasure!"

"It isn't that—it's the prospect of being with you," the girl answered, almost involuntarily.

Walter reddened a little—just as he had reddened yesterday when Mrs. Gurner made that awkward speech about keeping company; but he said never a word, and pretended to be rather busy with the horse for the next half-mile.

They left London by the Bayswater-road. For a long time villas and gardens, terraces, houses, detached and semi-detached, flashed by in endless succession; but when they had crossed Hammersmith-bridge they seemed to be in the country. Walter drove into Richmond Park by the Sheen gate, and across, by the wildest, loneliest roads in that lovely park, to the Kingston gate; little bursts of rapture breaking from Loo's lips at every change in the picture—the scudding deer starting up from the young fern; the arching elms above the road; the plantations of pine and firs and tender larch, where young gray rabbits flashed in and out among the undergrowth. These things were all as new to Louisa Gurner as life and the world were to that ivory statue of King Pygmalion's, which the indulgent goddess endowed with consciousness.

Walter drove slowly through the park. To the painter's eye, the vernal landscape was ever new and delightful, and he wanted to see what impression natural beauty would make upon Louisa. For a little while she spoke not a word, but gazed breathless, with parted lips, only expressing her pleasure by that occasional cry of delight; but words came at last.

"I don't so much wonder now," she said.

"You don't wonder at what?"

"Keats and Byron. It puzzled me so much to think where all their beautiful thoughts came from. But now I know the world is so lovely, it doesn't seem so strange there should be poets. A poet couldn't come out of Voysey-street."

"He would hardly be much of a singer if he had never been face to face with nature certainly. Yet there might be stuff for such a muse as Crabbe's, even in Voysey-street. And so you think the world lovely, do you, Loo? Yet Richmond Park is only a little bit of the world Byron knew."

"I feel as if I'd seen all that he saw," answered Loo. "When I read *Childe Harold* late at night, while grandma's asleep—not reading it as you'd read a novel, you know, but gloating over it—I seem to be standing by his side. If you were to ask me what Lake Lemman was like, or the mountains, or Rome, I couldn't tell you! but I feel as if I had it all in my mind—the water, and the sky, and the warm sweet air, and everything standing out clear and vivid, like a picture."

"The work of a strong imagination, Loo. Rather a dangerous gift," said Walter, with the air of a sage.

"Is it? Well, sometimes I do fancy I was happier before I knew there was such people as poets. I used to feel miserable enough then, to be sure, but it was a dull quiet kind of misery; it didn't hurt me so much. I could always sleep when I was tired, and forget my troubles. I don't think I ever dreamt, in those days. But now I feel restless, and there's a fever in my mind sometimes, and I have such wishes and longings for a brighter life!"

This speech uttered with that reckless candour which was a characteristic of Loo's, made Mr. Leyburne somewhat thoughtful.

"I'll tell you what it is, Loo," he began presently; "if you'd only let me carry out that idea of mine about your education, you might have as bright and happy a life as any girl need wish for. Just think how many doors education would open for you. You might get a situation as governess or companion in some family who were roving about the Continent, and then you would see Switzerland, and Italy, and all the ground *Childe Harold* travelled over. Do just consider."

"I have considered, and won't be beholden to you," answered Loo bluntly. "I don't want to be educated; I don't want to be made any better than I am. I should only feel my degradation more than I do now."

"But, my dear girl, why harp upon what you call your degradation? There's no degradation in poverty."

"Perhaps not. I daresay some people have the art of making

poverty delightful. You read about such people in novels. But there is degradation in dirt, and we are dirty; not for want of scrubbing and cleaning, for I don't spare that; but because everything about us is old and dingy and grubby; the dirt seems to have got into the pores of the house; and then grandma is dirty—it grows upon her as she gets older. And there's degradation in fine words mispronounced and misapplied; and grandma does it. There's degradation in not being able to pay one's way; and we can't pay ours. There's degradation in telling stories about pictures; and father does it. You can't lift me out of all that; I'm steeped to the lips in it."

"Really, Loo, you are the most incorrigible girl!" exclaimed Walter, sorely vexed by this obstinacy in Miss Gurner.

He wanted to do her some real service, feeling that he had done her disservice by raising her ideas above the dull level of her most prosaic surroundings.

"What am I to do for you, Loo?" he cried.

"Let me alone. I don't want to be taught to despise father. You can give me a day's pleasure like this, once in a way, if you like. I can live the rest of my life looking forward to it."

Walter did not respond promptly to this suggestion. He had begun to think already that this day in the country—a scheme of purest benevolence, like the summer treats which the charitable provide for ragged-school children—was rather a foolish business. Loo, with all her abruptness and roughness, was a dangerously interesting young person to the artistic mind—all the more interesting, perhaps, because so unconventional. There must be no repetition of this country drive, if he wished to marry Flora Chamney.

But did he wish to marry Miss Chamney? Of course he did—dear sweet little Flora, who was so fond of him. He had found out that secret ever so long ago. Pretty little Flora, whose voice went so well with his own, whose little hand trembled sometimes when he touched it unawares. Innocent little Flora, who was struggling up the steep mountain of art, with a box of crayons, chalking *Gulnares* and ancient beggarmen *ad nauseam*. Could he help loving that dear little girl, especially when Mark Chamney's desire upon this subject was so obvious?

For ten minutes, or even a quarter of an hour, Mr. Leyburne gave himself up to serious meditation. They were at Kingston by that time, driving through the gay little market-town, with its quaint gables and old-world air; then down by the Thames, and onward towards Thames Ditton and Moulsey. Loo was gazing around with wide admiring eyes. The solemn avenue yonder skirting the Palace grounds, the clear rippling water,

the pretty villas, all bright with tulip-beds and hyacinth-boxes, and early roses on southern walls; the cottage-gardens full of wall-flowers breathing sweetest odours. A world of beauty verily, after Voysey-street.

"Come, Loo," said Mr. Leyburne, putting aside serious thought as a business that could stand over, "it's almost time we began to think of halting somewhere. I mean to give you a row, as well as a drive. I know a nice little inn at Thames Ditton where they will give us a comfortable dinner; and while they're getting it ready, I'll row you up to Hampton Court-bridge, and we can land there and take a stroll in the Palace gardens; it is early yet, and there's no hurry."

"I wish the day could last for ever," said Loo, with a sigh; "everything is so lovely."

"The drive home will be still nicer, for we shall have moon-light."

"Yes, but it will be near the end then!"

They drove to the little inn—a quiet hostelry, almost unknown save to boating men; here Walter delivered the horse to the care of a friendly ostler.

"You've taken it out of him pretty well, sir!" said the man.

"I've brought him down from London. I don't call that very much."

"No more it ain't, sir; but he looks rather the worst for it."

"Well, give him a pail of warm gruel, and make him as comfortable as you can. He won't be wanted till eight o'clock."

"All right, sir!"

Walter went in quest of a boat. There were several lying on the little hard just in front of the inn-garden. He picked the lightest and brightest-looking, and presently they were gliding over the clear water towards Hampton, between banks that were all rustic, rush-bordered, willow-shaded. And now they began to talk; Walter dipping the sculls lazily into the water, the boat making slowest progress against the stream.

How he talked! pouring out every thought and fancy as freely as if Loo were his second self, his twin-born spirit, with a mind that nature had attuned to his—she seemed to understand him so thoroughly, and all she said chimed in so well with his own thoughts.

What can surpass the delight of two minds thus in harmony? One long summer's day of careless talk, between such companions, is a memory to outlast all vulgar pleasures, and endure changeless through a lifetime. Walter Leyburne had never been happier than he was to-day, leaning forward with slow-dipping oars, reciting his dreams, his hopes, his desires to Louisa Gurner. They lingered on the river, careless of the flight of time; then landed and sauntered in the prim, old-

fashioned gardens, with their glorious vistas of blossoming chestnuts, their placid artificial waters, their famous basin of gold fish. Still the stream of talk flowed on, and time was forgotten.

"I wish I'd had a sister like you, Loo!" said Walter, as they stood side by side looking down at the smooth water in the Home Park on the other side of the iron rails. "I'd have made you a painter, if you'd been my sister, and we should have been such chums!"

"You can make your wife a painter when you're married!" answered Loo, with a faint touch of bitterness; "that pretty Miss Chamney you're engaged to—I've heard you say she paints very nicely."

"Yes, she has talent, but it will be a long time before it comes to anything that I should call painting, and she hasn't so bold a mind as yours, Loo: she's not such a companion to a man as you are. One must sing duets, or talk about the last book she has read, to get on with her; but you seem to understand and sympathize with me about everything; you follow my thoughts everywhere, even when you have to grope through the dark. When I talked to you about *Æschylus* just now, I could see that you went with me into the dark hall where *Agamemnon* lay groaning in his bath. *Flora* would have only shuddered, and said 'How dreadful!'"

"But she has been well educated, and must know a great deal more than I do."

"She doesn't know a great deal of anything, but she knows a little of everything. She hasn't such deep thoughts as you have, Loo. Pray don't suppose that I mean to depreciate her; she is a dear little thing, and clever too in her feminine way; she's essentially feminine. If all women were like her, no one could ever have talked of the equality of the sexes. You might as well talk of equality between the oak and the primrose that grows at its foot, as talk of *Flora's* equality with a rough strong man."

"That sounds like high praise."

"Yes, she is a sweet little thing. But you make a mistake, Loo, when you talk of my being engaged to Miss Chamney. I am not actually engaged to her."

"Something very much like it though, I should think," answered Loo. "You talked as if it was a settled thing six months ago; and since then you've been always hanging about her, spending your evenings at her house."

"Except when I've spent them in *Voysey-street*."

"Except when you've dropped in to talk about pictures with father."

"And stopped to supper, and acquired a depraved appetite

for liver and bacon, and sausages, and tripe," said Walter, laughing.

There was a cloud on Louisa's brow which he was anxious to disperse.

"Be sure of one thing, Loo," he said; "whether I marry Miss Chamney or whether I don't, I shall always be your true friend, and as anxious for your welfare as if you were my sister."

"It's all very well to promise that," answered Loo, with a sceptical air; "but you can't tell how Miss Chamney would like it, when she's your wife. She mightn't care about such friends as me."

"She would care for any one I cared for."

"That's as may be; she wouldn't care for any one out of Voysey-street; she wouldn't care for a person connected with second-hand clothes—it isn't likely. But don't let us talk of disagreeable things. Tell me something more about Skylous."

"Æschylus!" suggested Walter; and obeyed the damsel's bidding. It was much pleasanter to discourse upon the mighty trilogy than to discuss that doubtful and perplexing question of his future relations with Flora Chamney and Louisa Gurner. He wished to do his duty to both, and please everybody. Rather a difficult achievement.

With the help of Agamemnon and Orestes pleasantness soon returned to their discourse; and forgetful of possible damage to the dinner ordered at the Black Swan, they dawdled under the chestnuts and in the quaint old garden, with its reminiscences of jovial Charles and Dutch William.

Mr. Leyburne, having abandoned Orestes to the Furies, gave Loo a brief historical lecture, on the strength of their surroundings, and felt that there was no easier or more agreeable labour than to open the gates of knowledge to a sharp-witted and sensible young person.

"I tell you what it is, Loo," he said, "you're what the Italians call *sympatica*, and it's the easiest thing in the world to get on with you. When I think how little you know and how much you understand, I'm absolutely thunderstruck."

Loo blushed at his praise; and that bright youthful look which means happiness glowed in her face.

They were a long time strolling about the gardens, a long time going back to the boat, nor did Mr. Leyburne exert himself tremendously in the row back to the Swan. The sun was sloping westward as they landed on the little causeway below the inn-garden.

"Never mind the sun," said Walter, when Loo suggested that it was growing late; "we shall have the moon with us all the

way home. The drive over Kingston Hill, on the old Portsmouth road, is splendid by moonlight."

All was very quiet at the Black Swan. The boating-men, who were the chief supporters of that riverside hostelry, were nowhere to be seen. Walter and Loo had the place all to themselves, as if they had been alone together in a world of their own. An elderly waiter exhibited an almost fatherly interest in their welfare, chid them gently for having occasioned the spoiling of an excellent dinner, and waited upon them with tender care.

Happily, neither Mr. Leyburne nor his companion cared very much whether the stewed eels were reduced to a pulpy condition, or the duckling roasted to rags. Walter had ordered a bottle of iced Moselle, which exhilarating beverage Louisa tasted for the first time. There was a gooseberry-tart with a jug of cream which these young people preferred to the coarser dishes that had gone before. Altogether the dinner was a success—to one of them at least a paradisiacal banquet. They lingered over it as they had lingered over every stage of that day of pleasure. The fatherly waiter brought them a pair of wax-candles, and the moon shone in through the now open casement of the rustic parlour, while they were still engaged with that delicious gooseberry-tart, happily unconscious that they had perchance been taking gooseberries in another form in their Moselle.

Even gooseberry-tart and cream must come to an end. The parental waiter cleared the table with that gentle dilatoriness which was the pervading charm of his manner, removing the glasses one by one, and toying fondly with the crumbs as he brushed them into his tray. Loo went to the window and looked out. The placid river ran rippling by under the moonlight—how different from that dismal Phlegethon she had seen sometimes from Waterloo-bridge!—the opposite shore had a dusky look against the clear dark azure of the sky; shadowy willows dipping in the stream, solemn poplars rising spire-like into the blue.

"I'm afraid it's ever so late," said Loo, in an alarmed tone, looking round at Walter, who sat with his elbows on the table, staring straight before him, curiously thoughtful; "how that Moselle makes one forget things! I never thought how the time was going."

"Why should you think about it?" asked Walter, waking from his reverie. "We are very happy, aren't we, Loo? What can anybody be more than happy? What can time matter to you and me?"

"But it does matter a good deal," answered Loo anxiously. "Grandma didn't say anything about the time I was to be home, and I forgot to ask her how long I might stay. But I

know she'd be very angry if I was late; and goodness knows how father might go on about it. He's dreadful when he's angry."

"He sha'n't be dreadful to you, Loo, if I'm by," said Walter, looking at his watch, but taking care not to enlighten Louisa as to the hour, which was later than he had supposed. "What time do your people go to bed?"

"All hours; sometimes eleven, sometimes twelve; sometimes ten, if father's cross. He generally goes to bed early if he's put out about anything."

"We shall be home before twelve, I daresay, Loo," answered Walter, trying to look unconcerned; he felt that he had been guilty in letting the time slip past. It hardly seemed a correct thing—even in a Bohemian state of society—to keep a young lady out till midnight.

"Before twelve!" exclaimed Loo, aghast. "But that's dreadfully late; father's sure to be angry."

"He shall not say a disagreeable word to you, Loo. I'll see him and explain everything."

"If he'll listen to you," said Loo, still frightened at the idea of parental wrath; "but he's so violent when he's in one of his tempers, and doesn't care for any one."

"I'll smooth him down, Loo, depend upon it. And now go and put on your things, while they get the trap round."

Loo ran away to put on her bonnet and shawl, and Walter gave the order for the immediate preparation of the dog-cart.

It was past ten already, and there was little hope of his seeing Voysey-street till after twelve.

CHAPTER XII.

"Love is no deity except when twin-born,
Sprung from two hearts, each yearning unto each,
Until they meet, though Hades yawn'd between them.
Thou art to me the world's one man, and I,
For good or ill, to thee the world's one woman."

HAVING given his orders, Mr. Leyburne went out into the garden to smoke a parting cigar. His thoughts had been curiously unsettled that afternoon; the cigar might have a soothing influence, and enable him to arrange his ideas better.

The air of the garden was perfumed with lilacs, guelder roses gleamed whitely in the dusk of the shrubberied border, the plish-plash of the river had a soothing sound—altogether a nice place for meditation and tobacco.

How happy he had been that day! What freshness and life there had been in Loo's companionship! Never for a moment had their talk flagged, save in those thoughtful pauses when silence is sweeter than words—never had he felt himself misunderstood. This was indeed society.

What if he were to shut his eyes to Loo's wretched surroundings and secure this companionship to himself for ever—make this day only the image and type of many a day to come—a lifetime of such days? Alas, there were too many reasons against his taking such a step! First, it is an almost impossible thing to sever a woman from her surroundings. To marry Loo would be to ally himself with grandma—grandma in her greasy gown; grandma whose breath hinted but too plainly at pickled onions, whose slipshod feet, dingy finger-nails, and affected gentility would be too heavy a burden even for affection—with Jarred; Jarred of doubtful honesty, doubtful cleanliness: Jarred the tricky and unscrupulous. From the thought of alliance with these Walter Leyburne recoiled with absolute horror.

In the second place he felt himself in a manner tacitly engaged to Flora. True that no word of love had ever passed between them; yet those gentle looks of hers, those gracious tones, were not the looks and tones of indifference. Could he, after all these months of happy fireside companionship, after being trusted by her father, coolly depart out of her life, and leave her, perhaps on the threshold of an awful parting—for Walter had seen the stamp of doom on Mark Chamney's face, and knew there must soon be severance for that devoted father and daughter—could he, knowing this, knowing how utterly lonely that poor child was, basely desert her, even if Bohemian Loo, with her gipsy cleverness, pleased his fancy better? He knew that Mark Chamney looked upon him as his future son-in-law. Mark, always transparent as crystal, had said enough to reveal that hope which had been in his mind from the very beginning of his acquaintance with the young painter. Flora would have a fortune about equal to his own; Chamney had told him that. There could be no question of mercenary feeling here. But to marry Loo would be to fling himself into a nest of adventurers. Even if Loo herself were free from every thought of greed, from every worldly consideration—and he was inclined to think her as indifferent to his wealth as Flora—could he doubt that Jarred and grandma, those advanced students in the school of poverty, were eager to draw him into their

toils, and would pluck him mercilessly were he to fall into the snare?

It was a connection which any young man with a grain of common sense would avoid as he would shun the bottomless pit. And yet—and yet—what a noble creature Loo had looked to-night, as she stood by the open window looking out at the moonlit river! What power and genius in that darkly-pale countenance, those splendid eyes, the eyes which had inspired him with the first idea of his *Lamia*! The claret-coloured dress became her tall slim figure, harmonized wonderfully with her complexion, and the dense blackness of her hair. In that dress, in that careless attitude, so graceful in its unconscious repose, she had looked as much a lady as if her name had been written in Burke's "County Families," her birthplace a baronial hall. Even her voice and manner of speaking had attuned themselves to his—she had lost the twang of *Voysey-street*.

"If she were my wife to-morrow I should be proud to show her to the world just as she is. No one would guess that she came out of a shop for second-hand gowns. If she and Flora were seen side by side, people would be more struck with her than with Flora; she has more style, more originality. She would look like a tropical flower beside an English primrose."

With such musings Mr. Leyburne beguiled the time till the dog-cart was ready. The result of his meditation was almost negative. He felt himself very much where he was before. Loo pleased his fancy most, and an artist's fancy is so great a part of his life. Flora had the stronger claim upon his heart. Prudence said, "Marry Flora." Errant imagination whispered, "With whom are you so happy as with Loo?" Duty urged, "You are bound to Flora." Conscience suggested, "May you not have endangered Loo's peace of mind?"

He left the garden with an uncomfortable feeling that, do what he would, he must wrong somebody. That scheme of giving Loo a good education, upon which he had relied as a happy issue out of his difficulties, had been a failure. What else could he do to prove his friendship for this singular girl? If she would not accept education from him, she would, of course, reject all pecuniary help. She would take nothing from him; and he could not marry her. He must therefore leave her amidst the wretchedness in which he had discovered her, leave her with a keener appreciation of her misery.

Loo was waiting for him in the room where they had dined, and the dog-cart was ready. He had but a glimpse of her face as they went out through the lamplit door of the inn, but he saw that she was very pale, and he fancied he saw traces of tears upon the anxious-looking face.

"Come, Loo, don't be down-hearted," he said; "I thought you had more moral courage than to be afraid of a few cross words from your father, even if he should think we have stayed too late. I'll stand by you, come what may. Yes," he added, with a little gush of feeling, as he settled her comfortably by his side in the dog-cart, and wrapped her in the warm shaggy rug—"yes, dear, I'll be true to you, come what may."

The words thrilled her. They had driven away from the inn, and were in a narrow bit of road, a mere lane leading up from that waterside tavern to the high-road, a dark bit of lane, sheltered and shrouded by over-arching trees. His breath was on her cheek, his disengaged arm, which had been busy arranging that rug for her comfort, clasped her waist, and drew her suddenly to him. Before she knew what was coming, his lips were on hers, in the first kiss of an irresistible love.

In the next moment they were on the moonlit high-road, and Mr. Leyburne had concentrated his attention upon his horse.

"You shouldn't have done that," said Loo, with a choking sound like a sob, as she readjusted her slightly disorganised bonnet.

"Do you think I don't know that I shouldn't? It was almost as bad as Paolo's kiss, and I deserve to float about in torment for it by-and-by—only with you, Loo. This shade should never leave you. Oh, Loo, why have you made yourself so dear to me? I want to do my duty to you, to everybody. I am almost engaged to that dear little girl in Fitzroy-square. I can't tell you how good she is, how pure and innocent and confiding. I verily believe she thinks me a demi-god, and that she'd be miserable if I were to desert her."

"Who wants you to desert her?" demanded Loo, in a hard dry voice. "I'm sure I don't. If you wished even—which of course you don't—to make a fool of yourself for my sake, do you suppose I would let you? I know too much of the world for that, though I have been brought up in Voysey-street. Don't let's talk nonsense any more, please, Mr. Leyburne. It was very mean of you to act like that just now; but I'm willing to pass it over, if it isn't repeated."

"You say that almost like your grandmother, Loo. There's a touch of the old lady's dignity. I won't offend you again; it was the fault of the dark lane. But if you knew what I felt just then, I think you'd forgive me."

"But I don't know, you see," remarked Loo.

"I felt as if I could surrender all I care for most in the world for that one kiss—how much more easily for the sake of going through life with you for my companion! I've been utterly happy to-day with you, darling. And yet, if I am to marry Flora, this ought to be our first and last day together. It's

such a perilous happiness, Loo. I wouldn't wish the repetition of it."

"If I'd thought you were going to talk to me like this, I wouldn't have come with you," said Loo.

How wildly her heart was beating all the time, and what exquisite joy she felt at the avowal her lips repressed! They were driving along the road between Thames Ditton and Kingston, the moonlit river flowing beside them; on the other side villas, with a light gleaming here and there in upper windows, denoting that the inhabitants of this peaceful region had for the most part retired for the night.

The horse flagged a little already, and Mr. Leyburne had to administer frequent encouragement with reins or whip.

"I'm afraid this fellow's done up," he said.

"Will he be very long getting us home?" asked Loo.

"I hope not. I daresay he'll go better presently when he feels his feet under him."

And in this hope they proceeded at a very moderate pace towards Kingston.

Who would have wished to hasten that moonlight journey, through scenes which, always fair, assumed a dream-like beauty in this tender light? Not Louisa assuredly, fearful though she felt of her father's probable anger. Not Walter, for this present hour was to him supremely delightful. The future was all cloud and perplexity, but the present was all-sufficing. They drove through the silent market-town, where a light in the casement of a solitary gable alone gave token of life. They mounted the hill, and were again alone with nature. That Portsmouth road has a solemn look after sundown, densely wooded here and there, and with steep banks that rise from the roadside on either hand. Silence was round them; they had night and the world all to themselves. Walter's lips, once loosened, were not easily locked, and between Kingston and Putney he had said everything which he had intended to leave unsaid. All his wise reflections in the inn-garden went for nothing. He poured his impassioned tale of a love that had stolen upon him unawares into Loo's too willing ear. The girl drank the poison, but showed more firmness and wisdom than her lover. By not a word did she betray the depth of her own feelings.

"Upon my soul, you're as cold as ice, Loo," he said at last, angered by her remonstrances or her silence; for she only spoke to reprove his folly. "One would think you were hardened in the ways of the world, and hadn't a spark of feeling left. You might as well tell me if you care for me, or if I'm making an idiot of myself for nothing."

"You shan't make me answer a question which you have no right to ask," Loo replied resolutely. "You promised to give

me a day's pleasure in the country. Do you suppose I'd have come if I'd known you were going on at me like this? It's mean of you. If I could get out of the dog-cart and walk back to London, I'd do it."

"Don't talk like that, Loo; you don't know how it wounds me. I thought you cared for me—just a little. I shouldn't have humiliated myself if I hadn't thought so. Never mind; I won't say another word. I daresay Flora will marry me if I beg very hard."

"Of course she will; and she is the proper person for you to marry. Nobody ever doubted that. And you know you love her, and think her like some innocent spring flower, white and pure and delicate, too tender to be left alone in the hard rough world," said Loo with heroic unselfishness, reminding him of his own words.

"Very well, Loo, since you wish it I'll say no more," he answered with dignity, and again devoted all his attention to the horse.

That tired steed was in such sorry condition, that it was nearly two o'clock when they drove slowly down Voysey-street, making an awful hollow-sounding clatter upon the uneven stones; Loo possessed by nameless fears. What would her father say to this post-midnight return? How might he not abuse her? Too well did she know that hideous vocabulary which he employed in moments of passion. She trembled as they drew near the house, from whose blank windows shone no friendly gleam of light.

There was no difficulty about holding the horse. That exhausted quadruped had little inclination to move, though he must have been sentient of the neighbourhood of his stable.

Walter dismounted and rang the bell, first cautiously, as to an ear awaiting the sound; then, after a pause, with a louder appeal; then still more loudly; but after ten minutes' patient expectation no one had come to open the door. Loo's white face looked at him awfully.

"Grandma must be asleep," she faltered. "You had better ring again."

He had his hand upon the bell when the door opened suddenly with a jarring noise, and Jarred Gurner confronted him in a *negligé* costume, that was remarkable neither for cleanliness nor elegance. A dark red-flannel shirt open at the brawny swarthy neck, a pair of trousers tied round the waist with dirty cotton braces, bare feet, and tousled hair denoted a hurried rising from his bed.

"Who's there?" he demanded, not without an expletive.

"Your daughter," answered Walter. "I'm sorry to have kept her out to such an unreasonable hour. We left Thames

Ditton in capital time; but that beast of a horse was dead-beat."

"Who did you say?" asked Jarred, regardless of the explanation.

"Come, Jarred, no nonsense. You're not going to be angry with your daughter for such a trifle—altogether my fault."

"My daughter!" echoed Jarred, with a strident laugh. "She's no daughter of mine. I don't deal in daughters who stay out with young men till two o'clock in the morning. Take the baggage away; she's no business in this house."

"Father!" cried Loo, pushing past her defender, who had kept himself well in front of her till this moment; "father!" she cried, with piteous appeal, "you're not going to turn me out of doors; you're not going to ruin my good name for ever! Father!" with tones that rose almost to a shriek as Jarred half shut the door against her, "you can't mean to shut me out! What have I done to deserve it?"

"You best know that," he answered. "Let the gentleman who has kept you out till two o'clock find you a lodging in future."

He shut the door with the last word. They heard the bolts pushed home, the rusty key turned, the chain put up—as if there were anything that needed the defence of bolts and bars in Jarred Gurner's domicile.

Loo stood aghast upon the doorstep. Her father had been less abusive than his wont; but he had done a thing which even her fears had never imagined.

"Never mind that brute," said Walter, almost choking with anger. "I'll take you to some respectable hotel. Don't be frightened, Loo. I'll take as much care of you as if I were your elder brother."

The girl planted herself on the doorstep, deadly pale, and with an angry light in her eyes.

"I have a good mind to stay here all night," she said. "To think that he should turn against me like that—my own father! And I've always been so fond of him!"

"He's a beast," exclaimed Walter; "and I daresay he was drunk."

"No, he was sober," answered Loo; "that's what I feel the hardest. If he'd been drinking, I shouldn't have minded so much; I could have borne it better. But he was quite cool—he didn't even use bad language. What can he think of me to treat me so?" demanded the girl passionately.

"I tell you he's a beast," repeated Walter, who could not get beyond that point. "Don't let's worry ourselves about him. Jump into the dog-cart, Loo, and I'll drive you to some respect-

able hotel. There's a place I know in the Strand where they stop up late for travellers."

"I won't stir out of Voysey-street," cried Loo with determination. "What! go away with you after what he said to me! I should like to stay on this doorstep all night, and for father to find me here to-morrow morning; but I suppose the policeman wouldn't let me. I'll knock up Mrs. Murgis at the general-shop. Mary Murgis and I went to school together at Miss Peminto's over the way, and I know Mary will give me a night's shelter."

"What's the good of a night's shelter? You can never go back to that house again."

"Can't I? It's the only home I have to go to. Do you think I'm going to be turned out of it in disgrace? I'll go back the first thing to-morrow morning, please God, and have it out with father."

"I tell you, Loo, it's impossible," cried the young man warmly. "Go back to that man's house after the insult he has just put upon you! You shan't do it. I told you I would be true to you, come what might. You shall never cross that threshold again, Loo. I'll take lodgings for you to-morrow."

"I've heard of that before," said Louisa in a freezing tone. "I've heard of people having lodgings taken for them, and sometimes of its going so far as a brougham and a pug-dog, I'd rather not, thank you!" with asperity.

Not a wild-wood blossom by any means, this young woman; not a snowdrop, whose petals no poisonous breath had ever polluted; but stanch and pure after her own fashion.

"Loo!" cried Walter indignantly, "do you think I am a scoundrel? Do you suppose I could be guilty of one unworthy thought in such an hour as this?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Leyburne. I daresay you're good and true," the girl answered remorsefully; only I feel as if the world was all wickedness—when my own father, that I've worked and slaved for ever since I was a child, can cast me out."

"You sha'n't go back to his house, Loo. Get a night's shelter from Miss—what's her name?—if you like. You shall go to a boarding-school to-morrow. You'll be safe there. And I'll go and tell your father where you are, and that you've done with him."

"Done with him!" the girl echoed plaintively. "There was a time when I thought the world was only father."

Walter lost no time in knocking up Mrs. Murgis at her general-shop. It was a dingy passage enough into which he and Loo were admitted when Mrs. Murgis arose from dreams and came down to answer that importunate bell, sorely troubled by

fears of fire, or ill-news from her married daughter at Ball's-pond. But Mrs. Murgis was kind, and listened to Loo's sad tale with sympathetic "tut-tuts" and "you don't say so's," and said that she could have half Mary's bed, and welcome; and thus Loo was safely disposed of for the night.

"You shall go to boarding-school to-morrow, whether you like it or not, Loo," said the young man eagerly, at parting. "I look upon your father's infamous conduct as providential. Even your obstinacy can't hold out any longer."

"I'll go to school if you like," answered Loo despondently. "It'll make things smooth, anyhow, and make the way clear for you to marry the young lady in Fitzroy-square. It can't much matter to anybody what becomes of me, when my own father doesn't care."

"But it does matter very much to me, Loo," said Walter.

They were in the dark passage just at the foot of a steep little staircase, which good-natured Mrs. Murgis had ascended to prepare for the unexpected guest, and Walter felt sorely tempted to repeat that sin of the shadowy lane at Thames Ditton; but if it had seemed to Loo a meanness then, it would surely seem meaner now. He refrained, therefore, and only pressed her hand with an honest brotherly squeeze.

"Come what may, Loo," he said impressively, "remember I've promised to be true to you."

And with that pledge he bade her "good-night," and went back to the patient quadruped, languishing for his stable.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Spring still makes spring in the mind
When sixty years are told;
Love wakes anew this throbbing heart,
And we are never old.
Over the winter glaciers
I see the summer glow,
And through the wild-piled snowdrift
The warm rose-buds below."

BRANSCOMB is not a fashionable watering-place; there is neither pier nor band, nor has any joint-stock company yet been found eager to experiment on the capabilities of the situation by the

erection of a monster hotel eight stories high, with *Louvre* windows commanding the wide-stretching Channel and distant Atlantic. Branscomb still languishes in obscurity; no speculative charlatan has discovered the peculiar balm of its atmosphere, and published it to the world as an elysium in whose calm breast lurk healing and the renewal of life. Branscomb produces nothing except a little lace—the patient work of women and children—is celebrated for nothing. Nobody, in the accepted sense of the word, was ever born at Branscomb. The name of the village figureth not in the *Biographical Dictionary*. Nothing ever comes from Branscomb. There is not so much as a ruined castle, historically famous, in the shadow of whose walls the frivolous may pic-nic. One dilapidated martello tower alone marks the landscape. Why built, it is rather difficult to imagine; for it is hardly within the limits of the possible that any hostile invader would ever essay to land at Branscomb. The cliffs are bold and high, of a dark red clay, rugged and crumbling-looking, as if of so loose a fabric that they might slip down into the ocean at any moment with briefest warning. Irregular in outline, grandly picturesque, is that western seaboard, while the inland landscape is fair as paradise.

Fishing is the chief, or indeed the only, resource of Branscomb. The village proper, the original Branscomb, is but a collection of fishermen's huts and a public-house or two. That Branscomb which visitors affect, and which calls itself a watering place, boasts a little bit of Parade, bounded by a roughly built sea-wall, a dozen or so of smallish, lowish houses, with bow-windows, much wooden balcony and verandah, and gardens abutting on the Parade. On the higher ground beyond this spot certain adventurous builders, oppressed with the builder's speculative propensity and with no more promising field for its exercise, have tacked on a few meagre villas, standing desolate in quarter-acre enclosures, which neither cultivation nor climate has educated into gardens. There is the beginning of a terrace—five slim bow-windowed houses breasting the stormy winds on the rise of a hill; houses inhabited by the wealthier of the fishermen, whose wives and families subside into kitchens and outhouses whenever Fortune favours them with lodgers. All the year round the fly-blown cards hang in the parlour-windows, but only in the glare and blaze of the summer solstice come visitors to Branscomb. Then perchance a few families from Long Sutton enliven the scene; troops of noisy children, who revel on the beach and scare the seagulls with their still harsher voices; a pair or two of maiden sisters, who pace meekly up and down the narrow path atop of the rugged cliff, and sniff the briny breezes from the Atlantic, and con-

gratulate themselves on the acquisition of a store of health, to be put away, like the household linen or the best glass and china, for future use.

Ocean's strand at Branscomb is hard and stony. There is no stretch of level sand for the delight of youth and infancy, no chalky cave where young mothers can sit and gossip and make pinafores, while their little ones raise those frail and perishable castles which seem fit types of future endeavour and its vain result. The friendly homely beauties of Ramsgate and Broadstairs are not here; but in their stead a certain wild picturesqueness, a certain rugged grandeur, not without its charm.

The Branscomb season—that halcyon period when the Parade and the five villas and the six houses in the terrace are wont to brim over with human life, and the local butcher will display as many as six legs of mutton pendent from his grim array of iron hooks on a Saturday morning—had not yet begun. The local grocer, stationer, linendraper, and fancy-repositor had not yet ordered his summer stock of one dozen pairs buff boots, thirteen as twelve. The two bathing-machines which enjoyed a monopoly of the Branscomb bathers still hibernated in the darkness of their winter shed. In a word, Branscomb had not yet awakened. Mr. Topsaw, the Long Sutton auctioneer, land-surveyor, and house-agent, had therefore ample room and verge enough for his selection of a house adapted to the requirements—to use Mr. Topsaw's familiar phrase—of a gentleman of property and his daughter, and affording accommodation for the gentleman of property's friends. Under these fortunate circumstances, Mr. Topsaw naturally chose the most expensive of the villas, and took care to inform the proprietress thereof that terms were not a consideration to the gentleman of property; his own profit by the transaction being five per cent. on the entire rental, to say nothing of the promise of a sovereign down on the nail, which Mr. Topsaw extorted from the lone widow who kept the house, by way of “dowser,” as he expressed it, as a mark of gratitude for his selection of her above her fellows, when he had the world of Branscomb all before him where to choose, and might so easily have carried the sunshine of his favour elsewhere.

It appears in the common order of things that when a variety of detached dwellings besprinkle the outskirts of a town or village, the dwelling last erected and farthest from the station, if station there be, and all other amenities of the settlement, is the largest and most architecturally pretentious of the number.

This was the case with Branscomb. Its ultima thule was a stuccoed villa of the Italian gothic order, surmounted by a campanile tower, whose sides were open to the winds of heaven,

and whose roof had been copied from the tender simplicity of an extinguisher. The house stood higher than its neighbours, on a road that ascended gradually from the low-lying village to the level of the cliff, divided from its margin by a cornfield. There was a garden, or arid tract of land, which grew wall-flowers, stocks, a scanty herbage that passed for grass, and in their due season marigolds and mignonette; one lonely monthly rose languished against the stuccoed wall, and by way of wood a belt of scanty bushes of the coniferous or sea-side tribe, shaped like the plumes that adorn a hearse, had been planted within the open iron-rail that divided the grounds from the dusty road. This domain, which did not boast as much cedar as would have made a pencil, nevertheless derived its name from that stately tree, and was called the Cedars.

Remote and solitary as the place was, it enchanted Flora. It was at least different from Fitzroy-square; that vast sweep of ocean with its infinite variety refreshed her eye as water-pools restore the traveller in Arabian deserts. She declared herself enraptured, and showered grateful kisses upon her father's grizzled hair, as he sat by the drawing-room window—the summer merit of the Cedars consisted in its walls being almost entirely window—and rested after a fifteen-miles coach-journey from Long Sutton.

"How good of you to come here, papa," she exclaimed; "and how clever of you to think of Branscomb, instead of letting me drag you off to Brittany or somewhere, tiring you to death with steamers, and rails, and diligences, and goodness knows what! I should think this must be quite as good as Brittany—as wild, and grand, and picturesque. Of course there are cathedrals there, and ruins, I suppose, and so on, for people to rush about and explore; but we can do very well without cathedrals, can't we, papa? or if we have a sudden yearning for gothic architecture, we can go to Rougement for a day or two. Now, dearest father, say you are pleased with Branscomb, and that it's just as nice to-day as when you were a boy."

She said this with that tender anxious air which had become almost habitual to her of late in her intercourse with her father. A sad foreboding of sorrow to come had been creeping gradually home to her loving heart; the fact of her father's altered health had become a stern reality beyond his power of concealment. That he was weaker than of old, more easily tired, more subject to pain, were bitter truths he could no longer hide from the keen eyes of love. But the worst Flora knew not. She knew not that her father's life hung by a thread, and that any moment of the long summer day might be his last. She thought him changed, grown so much older in one short year, but she tried to believe that this was but the natural decline of

the strong man's life, only the beginning of a long old age. Night and day she prayed God to spare him—to spare him for years to come, for all the days of her life; she could not imagine her life without him. Was it possible she could live, leave him lying in his narrow grave, hidden from the sunshine and the glory of the universe, and go on living, and even find some kind of happiness without him? She remembered one of the girls at Miss Mayduke's, whose father had died suddenly, and who had come back to school a few weeks afterwards in her black frocks. She had cried a good deal at first, in the dismal twilight interval between the studies, and at night in the dormitory; but her tears seemed to dry quickly enough, and she learnt her lessons, and ate her dinner, and looked forward to the holidays, just the same as the rest, and her voice soon grew loud and clamorous in the playground, like the other voices.

Dr. Ollivant enjoyed Branscomb almost as heartily as Flora. He seemed a new man now that he had escaped from the scientific atmosphere of Wimpole-street; all the more so, perhaps, because he had also escaped from the society of Walter Leyburne, whose demonstrative youth had weighed him down a little, perpetually suggesting unpleasant comparisons, continually reminding him how he had let youth and all its opportunities of happiness slip by. A bitter thought, that, of one crisis in our lives when supreme happiness was just within our reach, and by the sheer perversity and triviality of youth we let it slip. A thought to brood over in after years with deepest remorse, with grief unspeakable; yes, verily, “a sorrow's crown of sorrow.”

But Dr. Ollivant's memory could recall no such hour. He only reflected that youth was a wonderful and beautiful thing, and that he had sacrificed it upon the altar of science. He had put aside his youth altogether—bartered it, like Esau's birthright, for *his* favourite mess of pottage. He had won the great race by this very sacrifice; had outstripped the footsteps of his contemporaries, and placed himself in the ranks of eminent and successful men, who were from ten to twenty years his senior. Only he had paid the price. He had never allowed himself the relaxations or the affections of youth.

Not until of late had the knowledge of his loss come home to him. But seeing what a bright thing youth appeared in this stranger, he began to ask himself whether he had not been cheated out of a gift that was almost divine.

“If I had known Flora Chamney ten years ago,” he thought, “if Fate had made us contemporaries, how different my life might have been!”

There were moments—brief intervals of infatuation no doubt

—in which he used to ask himself if it were really too late; if he might not yet enter the lists with this younger and more attractive rival. Nothing definite had been said as yet; he knew that from Mark. The young man had hung back somewhat strangely, as it seemed to the fond father.

"And yet I'll answer for it he loves her," said Mark, in his impetuous way.

"He would be something less, or more, than human if he did not," answered the doctor.

But that purblind father drew no inference from the speech. He had set his heart upon seeing Walter and Flora married. The union would be perfect, like a marriage in a fairy tale. The idea that human passion could stir the breast of this grave pale doctor, with his deep-set thoughtful eyes, never entered Mr. Chamney's mind.

The doctor made the most of his holiday. After all, happiness is a thing of the present, and a man might be happy the day before his execution if the companion his soul loved dearest cheered him in his lonely cell. They chartered a fishing-boat, put up a rough awning to shelter them from the sun, and sailed merrily over those blue waters from after breakfast till dinner-time. When Mark was tired, they made him lie down upon a luxurious bed of sail-cloth and carriage-rugs, and Flora read Shelley or Browning to him.

"I can't say I quite understand what they're driving at," he said; "but it's certainly soothing." Whereupon he would compose himself to slumber; and then, after a couple of pages or so, Flora would tire of Alastor, or Epipsychidion, and close her book, and talk to Dr. Ollivant.

It was curious to discover how little the doctor knew or cared about those modern singers, with whose music Walter Leyburne, was so familiar. But then, on the other hand, he had read Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries with profoundest love, and had Homer in his heart of hearts.

"I thought you never read anything but medical and scientific books?" the girl said wonderingly, after he had opened the treasure-house of his memory for her entertainment.

"I very rarely do now. I had a passion for those Elizabethan poets when I was a lad, and for Homer. I think I half lived in the old Greek world—a fairyland of dreams—till I began to see that science is something nobler than the memory of the past. I have Shakespeare and Homer in my consulting-room, and take down a volume once in a way, when I am more than usually tired; but that doesn't happen often. The inconvenience I most suffer from is want of time, not flagging attention; though, by the way, my thoughts have gone astray sorely lately." He said these last words with a

regretful look at that innocent young face turned to him so frankly. Ah, what pain she gave him by that too candid friendliness, which told him he might be never more than friend!

"Of course," exclaimed Flora eagerly, "you are over-worked; papa is always saying so. See what harm he has done himself by working so hard in the prime of his life, though he will get over all that, and grow quite strong again by-and-by, please God. You ought not to slave like that, Dr. Ollivant. It is all very well when one is young, but as one grows older——"

"I promise to relax my labours somewhat when I am old," said the doctor; "but I can hardly claim the privilege of age yet awhile. Ancient as I doubtless appear to your young eyes, I am not forty."

"Indeed!" said Flora. She had the vaguest estimate of the various stages of life—whether a man were old at forty or only began to be old at sixty. In her juvenile imagination life after thirty was but a down-hill progress. Youth and good looks, with most things that sweeten life, disappear behind the crest of that hill which youth climbs so gaily. She could hardly imagine what the journey was like on the other side. She wondered a little at the doctor's half-complaining tone, as he must surely have put away all youthful aspirations ever so long ago.

"Was it too late?" he asked himself sometimes, with a wild flash of hope.

She listened with rapt attention when he talked to her. His conversation at least could charm her. She was even interested in his career—curious about that laborious youth which he had spent in parish drudgery or in foreign hospitals. Then he opened his heart and mind for her, and painted a life that was not altogether unheroic, not without some human interest; but not a whisper, not a breath of youth's enchantment, nothing of love or woman's loveliness.

Once, deeming him so far removed from herself by reason of his advanced years, she was bold enough to ask a question that to him was startling:

"In all you tell me, you have never mentioned ——" she began rather shyly, and then was obliged to reconstruct her sentence: "I wonder that in all your travels you never met any one—whom you—whom you cared for well enough to marry."

He looked at her with that strange half-bitter look whose meaning she could not read.

"Curious," he said, "wasn't it? Curious that I didn't tread the beaten track: fall in love with some respectable young woman at twenty; marry at twenty-three; go back to Long Sutton, and set up as a family practitioner; walk in the foot-

steps of my father, in short; and look forward with placid resignation to the day when my name should be written under his on the family tombstone. I daresay after all that is the happiest manner of life, if modern youth could only put aside its passionate aspirations for something better. After all, are not the lives of all men written in water? Our petty struggles to win fame are, for the most part, futile, or the reward of our labours as perishable as the Grecian's crown of wild olive. Yet perhaps a doctor, whose life is in a manner a hand-to-hand conflict with the great mystery of pain, may take a purer pleasure out of his smallest victories than the man who wastes his nights in verse-writing, or his days in painting pictures which could have been painted better three hundred years ago. *Our* profession," with some touch of pride, "is at least progressive."

"It is a noble profession," said Flora, "and I can't wonder you are proud of it. But please don't run down our poor painters, even if Raffaele and Titian did paint better. They had popes, and emperors, and people, you know, to encourage them. I hope you don't despise painters."

"Hardly. Yet I confess there seems to me something rather ignoble in any profession which produces only ornament—a life entirely given to the cultivation of fancy."

"But you haven't told me why you didn't marry?"

"First, because I put the marriage question out of my mind altogether when I took up the profession of medicine."

"What, made up your mind to be an old bachelor!"

"No! but made up my mind to succeed in my profession before I ventured to contemplate the idea of marriage."

"Ah," said Flora, with a compassionate sigh, "that was a pity, because——"

"Because what?" he asked, when she stopped in the middle of her sentence.

"Because it takes such a long time to succeed in any profession, and—please don't be offended if I say anything that sounds rude—by the time a man has succeeded, he must be an old bachelor."

"An old bachelor! I suppose, now, in your mind that means any one on the wrong side of thirty?"

"Why, yes; at Miss Mayduke's we used to call thirty old; but I daresay that's only a schoolgirl's notion."

"Do you think it quite preposterous, now, for a man of my age, much nearer forty than thirty, to have some idea of marriage?"

"Not at all," she exclaimed eagerly, and a gleam of gladness shot into the doctor's dark eyes, "provided you married a suitable person."

The pleased look faded as quickly as it had come.

"What do you mean by a suitable person? Some one of my own age, I suppose."

"Of your own age, or a few years younger. Not an old maid, with disagreeable prim ways, or a cat and a parrot: but some charming widow. There was a widow who had two daughters at Miss Mayduke's; her husband had been in the China trade—silk, or tea, or something. She used to dress so stylishly."

"Thanks. I abhor stylish widows. If I were forced to make an election between two evils, I would rather have the old maid with her cat and parrot. I should have a greater chance of peace. No, Flora, I will never marry, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I can love, and be loved again."

Flora twirled the leaves of her book, and gave another little compassionate sigh, faint as the summer breath that stirs a fallen rose-leaf.

Poor infatuated man! She was really sorry for him. As if any one could win all the brightest things of earth, and, after having given his youth to the swift race for fame, turn back and say, "O, but I also desire the joys of the rose-garden!" Why, the end of the race leaves him far off in the bleak desert, the shingly Patagonian waste of middle age, where there is no rose-garden.

She felt a curious, half-scornful, half-tender pity for the grave doctor after this, and thought more of him and his lonely life than she had thought until now, wondering whether he would ever see any one of a suitable age, whom he could like; trying to imagine what kind of sentiment love must be between people who were past thirty; whether the gentleman would write romantic love-letters, and the lady would blush and tremble at his footsteps just the same as in youth. She could not imagine anything so incongruous as middle age and romance; she could only picture the courtship a business transaction, the marriage a sober prosaic affair, the bride dressed in silver-gray silk. Feeling therefore the utter impossibility of the doctor ever finding his way back to the rose-garden, she was particularly kind to him—dangerously, fatally kind—for she inflamed his passion to fever-point.

CHAPTER XIV.

"It is a painful fact, but there is no denying it, the mass are the tools of circumstances: thistledown on the breeze, straw on the river, their course is shaped for them by the currents and eddies of the stream of life."

THE Chamneys had been more than a fortnight at Branscomb, and Mr. Leyburne had not yet made his appearance. Flora began to feel deeply wounded by such persistent neglect. The doctor had been twice to and fro between London and the little Devonshire watering-place. While he could do so much for friendship and "auld lang syne," for the remembrance of those boyish days when Mark Chamney had been his champion and protector, Walter could make no sacrifice, take no trouble. And yet she had dared to think he would have been moved by a warmer feeling than friendship.

"After all, I must have made a mistake," she said to herself with a regretful sigh, as she put on her coquettish little hat to go for a seaside ramble with the indefatigable doctor, who had only come down from London that afternoon, and yet was ready for an evening walk; "I have been deceived by the kindness of his manner, that flattering manner which evidently means nothing. What should a poor little schoolgirl know about a young man's feelings? We never saw any young men at Miss Mayduke's, except the drawing-master, who must have been thirty if he was a day; and we were always making mistakes about him. I know Cecilia Todd fancied he was breaking his heart for her, till he calmly announced to us one morning that he had been engaged for the last five years to the music-mistress in a school at Highbury."

It was not without a good many gentle sighs that Flora resigned herself to the idea that Mr. Leyburne had never cared very much about her; that he only regarded her as a young person whose company was agreeable enough to amuse the leisure of an idle evening, and no more. Even after she had settled this matter in her own mind, she found herself just as anxious about the arrival of the London express—or rather the blundering, rumbling old coach which brought passengers from the Long Sutton station—just as expectant of a lightly-built, active-looking figure ascending the steep road that climbed the cliff to the Cedars. She looked out for him every day, from the

gothic window of her bleak little dressing-room; and Branscomb seemed less beautiful, and yonder waste of waters less magnificent every evening, when the passengers from the coach had had time to go their several ways, and still Walter came not.

"I should have thought he would have hated London in such weather as this, and would have seized upon any excuse to get away from it," mused Flora; "those grimy old streets—those everlasting squares—that smoky atmosphere! Who would stay in London when the woods are full of flowers, and the sea changes colour every hour with the changing sky? A painter, too, who ought to be so fond of Nature. It's all very well to talk about finishing his picture; but now the Academy is open there can be no reason for his being in a hurry. He can't exhibit the picture before next year."

Mr. Chamney expressed his wonder at the young man's non-appearance, and those remarks of his were somehow painful to Flora. She felt as if it were her fault that Walter Leyburne was so slow to come. If she had been prettier or more attractive, she told herself, he would not have been such a laggard. Her father had hinted his wish about Walter too broadly for her to be unaware of that fancy. She knew that he would have liked Walter Leyburne to fall in love with her; that he had given the young man every encouragement to avow himself. It was humiliating to think that he had hoped in vain; that she lacked the power to win the lover her father would have chosen for her.

"I'm a poor little insignificant-looking thing," she said, as she contemplated her small face in the glass—a face whose beauty was pale and delicate as the loveliness of a wood anemone, a little white flower that a child would tread upon unawares while darting after a tall gaudy foxglove. Flora saw no charm in the small oval face, the tender gray eyes with their dark lashes, the little cupid's-bow mouth; she felt that she lacked the splendour of beauty which a painter would naturally require in the object of his adoration. What was she compared with Gulnare the magnificent? that Gulnare whose dark and florid charms, eyes big as saucers, lips carmine and pouting, she had copied in crayons. She felt herself a very poor creature indeed, and wondered that she had ever been so foolish as to fancy Walter could care for her.

This conviction had taken deep root, when one warm June evening brought a glad surprise to dispel it. They had been for a long drive to Didmouth—a sister watering-place, with greater pretensions both to beauty and fashion than humble Branscomb. The doctor had been with them, the day lovely, and they had dawdled away a couple of hours pleasantly enough, lunching at the hotel by the beach, and strolling through the one narrow street, Flora stopping every now and then to look at the lace

in rustic shop windows—lace which Mark was ever ready to buy for his little girl. What could be too good or too rare for her who was all the world to him?

They had stayed out rather later than usual, and the sun was low when their hired wagonette, a homely vehicle, drove up the hill to the Cedars. Leaning upon the gate, with folded arms and cigar in mouth, was a figure Flora knew but too well. Her heart gave a leap at sight of him. All the face of creation changed and brightened in a moment, glorified by Hope's supernal light. She had given him up; she had told herself that he cared nothing for her, set no value even on her sisterly friendship, had never dreamt of winning her love. His presence seemed to falsify all her forebodings. She accepted it at once as the promise of happiness. He cared for her a little—nay, perhaps even loved her—or he would hardly be there.

His attitude was the perfection of comfortable laziness; arms loosely folded, eyes gazing seaward, cigar-smoke curling upward in blue wavelets against the rosy evening light. His gaze was so intent upon yonder expanse of ocean, his thoughts so completely abstracted, that he did not even hear the wheels of the wagonette—did not look up till it stopped in front of him. Then, indeed, he was all smiles and brightness, made haste to open the gate, assisted Flora to alight, and shook hands effusively with Mr. Chamney.

"I thought you had forgotten all about us," said Flora's father, a little wounded by his neglect.

"No, indeed; but I've had so much to do, and I've been rather worried."

"You look like it. Late hours, I daresay, young gentleman. Never mind; you'll leave off that sort of thing when you've a nice little wife to keep you in order."

Walter coloured like a girl, and stole a guilty look at innocent Flora, whose face was radiant with happiness. No one could mistake that expression; no one could misread the deep joy shining out of those clear eyes. Dr. Ollivant had seen her face light up just now, and knew what that happy look meant. What would he not have given to have caused that brightness? What sacrifice would he have counted too costly?

"Indeed I did not forget your kind invitation, Mr. Chamney," pleaded Walter; "but I couldn't get away sooner. I had one or two little bits of business to settle before I could leave London."

"Business! One would think you were a merchant. However, here you are. We must be satisfied if we get the leavings of your time, mustn't we, Flora?" added Mark, with a touch of bitterness.

"Of course, papa. Mr. Leyburne has his profession to think

of before everything," replied Flora in a sweet excusing tone, as if she could have forgiven anything in this modern Raffaele.

Walter coloured again. He had not touched a brush since the Chamneys left town.

"Dear Miss Chamney," he said, "you are always so good. I should be miserable if your papa thought I did not value his invitation and the privilege of being down here. Honestly, I could not come sooner."

"My dear fellow, do you suppose any one doubts your word?" said Mark heartily.

Some one did doubt it—the doctor, whose watchful eye had noted the young man's embarrassment, that red flag of distress which he had hung out more than once during this brief dialogue.

"There's something not quite right here," thought Cuthbert Ollivant. "A pity, since this foolish child is so fond of him."

After this they went indoors and sat down to a comfortable tea-dinner, and every one seemed happy. Walter rattled almost as gaily as of old in the cheerful Fitzroy-square evenings. Flora sat between her father and the new arrival, Dr. Ollivant opposite. The table was small, and they made the snuggest possible family party; the doctor carving, and making himself generally useful, but not talking very much, not by any means so eloquent as he had been wont to be when they were only a trio. But no one marked the change. Mr. Chamney leaned back in his easy-chair, sipping his tea, and watching and listening to the two young people. It was so pleasant to him to hear their fresh young voices, to sun himself in their smiles and glad looks. And Walter, who had little more resistance than a bright water-flower, which moves with every motion of the stream whereon it grows, suffered himself to be beguiled by the influence of the hour, and behaved just as if there had been no such person as Loo in existence; as if that moonlit journey from Thames Ditton had been nothing more than a dream.

Flora had hired a piano, of course, being as little able to exist without music of some kind as the canaries to dispense with their daily rations of birdseed. After tea they went to work at the old duets, the tender bits of Mozart, the old-fashioned English ballads which seemed to have been composed on purpose for Flora, so exquisitely did that fresh young voice express words and melody. Flora's singing was the one fascination which Walter could not resist. Her talk was not so vigorous or amusing as Loo's, her beauty far less striking or varied; but her song never failed to enrapture him. While he listened he was her slave. Mark Chamney sat at the open window, half in and half out of the room, smoking his cigar, and listening contentedly to his little girl's singing. He did not know that it

was absolutely perfect of its kind. He only knew that it was just the kind of singing he best liked.

It gave him unspeakable happiness to see those two together again, and to fancy that the link which he had dreamed of between them was as strong as ever. He had been unhappy at the young man's apparent hanging back; but he, like Flora, accepted his coming as a sign of loyalty and devotion.

"How could he help loving my little girl?" thought Mark.

After the singing, Flora, who was now in the highest spirits, took Walter to see her new domain—the garden which grew so little, the wall which was to be covered with myrtle and roses when they came back to Branscomb next year; for they meant to come, Flora told Mr. Leyburne; they liked Branscomb too well to be tired of it in a single summer.

"You can join us in our ramble if you like, Dr. Ollivant," she said graciously; and then, feeling that she had been somewhat neglectful of her father's friend since Walter's arrival, she added an entreaty: "Do come, please, and help me to illustrate the beauties of Branscomb. They call it illustration, don't they, at the panoramas? Do come with us, Dr. Ollivant."

What could he do but obey?

"Being your slave, what should I do but tend upon the hours and times of your desire?" he said with a light laugh, and flung away his half-smoked cigar, and gave Flora his arm, as much as to say, "If I go with you I will have something."

Walter could not very well ask for the other arm, which would have seemed like pinioning such a poor little thing as Flora. So he strolled by her side, and they crossed the moonlit grass—the moon had grown old and young again since Loo's day in the country—and went along by the edge of the cliff, upon a narrow path that had a delightfully dangerous look, and promenade the little bit of parade, where Flora made Walter admire the quaint old wooden houses, with no two windows alike, twinkling gaily with lights; for visitors had now begun to arrive at Branscomb for the bathing season. Then she took him down to the pebbly beach, which was loose and uncomfortable for the feet, but infinitely picturesque—a broken irregular line of beach, making a shallow bay—with fishermen's boats and tackle scattered about in every direction, and the whitest, most rustic of coastguard stations standing boldly out on a little promontory in the distance.

"You'll paint some delightful sea-pieces, won't you?" asked Flora. "Dear little fisher-boys and fisher-girls with ruddy complexions and big feet and hands, and their mouths open as if they were in the act of swallowing the sea-breeze, and a salt sea-weedy look about everything."

"Thanks," said Walter with his languid air; unless I felt pretty sure of becoming a Hook or a Stanfield, I couldn't give my mind to sea-scapes, or fishermen's boys, or brown-sailed luggers, or any of those varieties of sea-coast life which people so keenly appreciate in every exhibition of pictures."

"I forgot; you are going to be a Holman Hunt or a Millais," said Flora, with a shade of disappointment. It would have been so nice to sit on the beach all through the sunny morning, sheltered by a canvas umbrella, watching Walter sketch, and improving herself by his example. "I tried to sketch by myself," she said dolefully, "when we first came. But my sea used to get so muddy, and my skies would come out like mottled soap, so I gave it up in despair."

"You dear foolish child," said Walter sagely—he had come to Branscomb sternly resolved to treat Flora in all things as a child, a sweet younger sister, and to go back unfettered and uncommitted—"why are you always dabbling in colours, instead of trying to master the difficulties of form? I thought you were going to work at that cast of a foot I gave you."

"That big, muscular, plaster-of-paris foot!" sighed Flora. "I did work at it honestly for the first few days; I did it in ever so many positions. But feet are so uninteresting, and there was the sea looking lovely before my windows, and moist colours are so tempting, I couldn't help trying my hand at the little fisher boats, and the blue dancing waves!"

They left the beach, and peeped at the small original Branscomb, the fishermen's cottages sunk below the level of the road, which had risen with the march of ages, reducing the cottage parlours to cellars. It was all quaintly ancient and picturesque; and Walter owned that, for any painter who did not aspire to the classic, Branscomb would be full of subject.

"It's just the place for a man who wants to paint pot-boilers," he said. "There's not a corner of the village that wouldn't make a little rustic bit which would be a safe five-and-twenty guineas before the first week in May was out. But, thank Heaven and my uncle Ferguson, I can get on without pot-boilers. I'll do a little picture for your father, though, Flora, if you think he'd like it—a *souvenir* of Branscomb."

"Of course he'd like it. He'd be charmed with it. How good of you to think of such a thing!" exclaimed Flora. "And now we must go home, or papa will be sitting up too late."

This was the beginning of a fortnight of summer days, in which Flora was completely happy.

Dr. Ollivant went back to his duties the day after Walter's arrival, promising to return in a fortnight, and making as light of the journey as if it had been the hour and a quarter between London and Brighton. Dr. Ollivant departed, but he was not

essential to Flora's happiness. She was indeed happier without him, now that she had Walter for her companion; for she was dimly conscious that, let the doctor be never so civil, he was not the less antagonistic to Mr. Leyburne. Cynical speeches seemed to slide unawares from those thin firm lips; nay, by a simple elevation of the eyebrows the doctor's expressive face could indicate how poorly he thought of this paragon of youths. Flora felt it a relief, therefore, to be alone with Walter and her father, to feel that there was no element of cynicism or disbelief in the painter's genius, or the painter's future, among them.

So they sailed upon that summer sea, or went for long excursions in the wagonette, exploring every nook and corner of the country, or they dawdled away the long sunlit days on the beach, reading, sketching, dozing. Mr. Chamney, at least, got rid of a considerable portion of the summer afternoons in placid slumber; while Walter and Flora sat beside him talking, or reading poetry in low monotonous murmurs, slumberous as the gentle plash of wavelets against the beach. This holiday of mind and hand, this utter idleness beside the sea, seemed sweeter than any leisure Walter had ever known. He was not in love with Flora—he reminded himself of that fact half a dozen times a day with a remorseful pang, when he had been betrayed into some lover-like speech, which was calculated to mislead this tender innocent who loved him so well. He knew that he was very dear to her; he had read the secret a hundred times in the artless face, had been told it over and over again by the artless lips.

"She is the dearest little girl in the world," he said to himself, "and Chamney is a dear old fellow, and I'm bound to marry her."

And then there flashed back upon him the vision of that moonlit road between Kingston and Wimbledon, and memory recalled the words he had said to Louisa Gurner, the stolen kiss in the lane, those deep dark eyes into which he had looked for one passionate moment with love that recked not of worldly wisdom's restraining power—love which in that one moment had been master of his soul—love before whose fierce tide all barriers of circumstance had gone down. He remembered Loo, and it seemed a hard thing to forsake her; poor Loo, who had been turned out of her wretched home for his sake, perchance with blighted name; for the social law of Voysey-street upon the subject of reputation was stern as the laws of Belgravia. Black sheep lived there and were tolerated; but the mark once set upon them remained indelible, and they were only tolerated in their character of black sheep, and had to suffer the sting of sarcastic reference to past peccadilloes upon the smallest provocation.

Loo had suffered in her tenderest feeling—her love for her

reprobate father. Loo had possibly suffered the loss of that irrecoverable treasure, woman's good name. Mr. Leyburne had done his best for her, after his lights, by placing her forthwith in the care of the Miss Tompions of Thurlow House, Kensington, where she was to be thoroughly grounded in all the branches of a useful modern education. He had told the elder Miss Tompion that he intended his protégée to remain in her care three years, and that lady had assured him of her power to impart a sound education in that period, and to qualify her pupil for the post of governess to children under twelve years of age.

"Accomplishments," said Miss Tompion, "are flowers of slow growth; but if Miss Gurner have a taste for music——"

"She has!" cried Walter eagerly.

"She may be able to impart instruction in music to girls of twelve after three years' painstaking study on her own part. She is painstaking, I hope?"

Walter did not know. He knew that this poor girl had worked hard at the dull slavery of household toil, that she had a mind quick to learn; but could not answer for her perseverance or laboriousness in this new path she was about to tread.

"She is very quick in learning anything," he answered, "and has a remarkable love of literature—especially poetry."

Miss Tompion looked doubtful.

"A taste for poetry, acquired under the guidance of a cultivated understanding, after education has formed the mind, is a source of delight to its possessor," she said solemnly; "but an ignorant undisciplined love of poetry in an ill-regulated mind I should consider a fatal tendency, and one I should deem it my duty to check, even to the verge of severity," added Miss Tompion, with an awful look at Loo, who was crying behind her veil.

Walter recalled this little scene in the primly-furnished drawing-room at Thurlow House, and remembered with keenest pang how Loo had cast herself sobbing on his shoulder at parting.

"It's ever so much worse than Voysey-street," she had whispered to him. "Do—do ask father to take me back! I'll go back to the scrubbing, the dirt, the debt—anything would be better than *this*!"

"This" meant Miss Tompion's solemn aspect, as she stood tall and straight, the incarnate image of starched propriety, in the midst of that temple of Minerva, the Thurlow House drawing-room, an apartment in which not a chair was ever seen out of its appointed space.

He had left Loo in this ladylike imprisonment, after giving a reference to his solicitor, which had convinced Miss Tompion of Loo's respectability; a fact she might have been inclined to question, had it not been supported by the solicitor's guarantee. That claret-coloured silk dress and Louisa's striking appearance

had gone a little against Mr. Leyburne's protégée in the well-ordered mind of the schoolmistress.

Having disposed of Louisa's life for the next three years, Mr. Leyburne might be fairly said to have relinquished all farther concernment in her fortunes or fate. Certain quarterly payments he would have to make during her pupilage; but at its termination she would go out into the world an independent, self-supporting young woman, and the thought of her need trouble him no more. Yet, in having done this much, he felt as if he had done nothing for her—absolutely nothing—when weighed against that one stolen kiss in the shadowy lane.

The image of the absent Louisa, therefore, was apt to come between Mr. Leyburne and Flora when he was most inclined to be happy, and it always brought perplexing thoughts in its train. There were hours when it seemed to him that Flora's sweetness of disposition was the one charm which a man should choose to brighten his life; there were other hours when he thought that Flora might be but a childish helpmate for one who hoped to be distinguished by-and-by.

Mark Chamney looked on meanwhile, innocent as one of the sheep he had reared on the Darling Downs, and told himself that all was well, and his little girl's future a settled thing. Who could see those two together and doubt their love for each other?

"I always felt that it must be so," he said to himself; "I always knew that Providence meant them for one another. Providence is too good to leave my little girl alone in a cold unloving world. God has raised up a heart to comfort and cherish her when I am called away."

CHAPTER XV.

"The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, O, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm."

At the end of the fortnight the doctor came back, looking all the worse for his London work, haggard and pale and careworn. His friends noticed the alteration. He had been working too hard, they said.

Unhappily for Dr. Ollivant, however, it was not professional labour that had wrought the change in him. He had been trying to live without Flora, trying to forget the charm of her presence, schooling himself to endure his life without her or any hope of future union with her; trying his uttermost, and failing piteously. Love, when he fastens on a victim of Cuthbert Ollivant's age, is not the tricky spirit that leads youth along the path of pleasure with a chain of roses. The Eros of middle-life is an implacable master, who binds his slave with fetters of iron, and drives him with an iron goad.

Mark Chamney welcomed his old schoolfellow with more than usual heartiness. He was happier than when they had parted, happy in the assurance of Flora's future. The grip of his hand had all its old strength.

"You look all the better for Branscomb, Mark," said the doctor.

"Do I? Well, you see, I've been enjoying myself more than usual this last week or so."

"Hardly complimentary to me," said the doctor.

"Don't suppose I haven't missed you, Ollivant, for I have. My pleasure has been purely vicarious. I enjoyed seeing our youngsters together. Walter and Flora have been so delighted with the place and the fine weather and each other. It has done my heart good to watch them."

The doctor's face clouded, as it always did at any mention of Walter Leyburne. Master of himself as he was in all other respects, he had not yet learned to govern himself in this.

They had planned various excursions for the week—a drive to

an old church among the verdant wooded hills, called Tadmoor in the Wilderness; a church which had long been disused except in connection with the picturesque secluded burial-ground that stretched at its feet; a church which, according to west-country tradition, was one of the oldest in England.

The wagonette was in attendance at eleven o'clock next morning, and Flora prepared with a neatly-packed basket, containing a pigeon-pie and a pound-cake, a punnet of big scarlet strawberries and a bottle of cream, with other bottles, et cetera, which made the basket rather heavy. She had shawls and rugs in abundance, lest dear papa should feel cold, and was full of loving care for his safety.

Walter was to be coachman, an office for which he had begged earnestly. Mark took the seat at his side, so Flora and the doctor sat opposite each other in the wagonette, an arrangement which filled the doctor with delight. He had come back to Branscomb reckless of the future, determined to get just as much happiness as he could get out of the present, without after-thought or calculation. To sit opposite to her in that rustic vehicle; to see every change of shadow and sunlight that flitted across her innocent face; to talk to her and listen to her gentle intelligent replies; to be with her undisturbed, her companion and friend and counsellor! What deeper joy need he ask of the present hour than this?

He shut his eyes to the future, therefore, and abandoned himself, heart and soul, to this immediate happiness. Mr. Chamney was in a talkative mood; went over his Australian experiences—familiar ground to Walter; and the young man had about as much as he could do to attend to his companion and the horse—no time for turning round to talk to Flora, except for an occasional word or two about the beauty of the landscape. Three of the party had to alight a good many times to walk up the hills, which are of the steepest in this district. But the doctor insisted that Mark should keep his place—such hills as these were not for him to climb. He assented with a sigh.

"It's a hard thing to get old and feeble," he said. "When I think of the mountains I've scaled in Australia, and find myself unequal to these molehills, I am disagreeably reminded of age and decay."

Walter led the horse, and Flora and the doctor walked side by side. He told her all about the wild flowers she gathered from the steep green banks beside the road; their names, their properties—all the attributes that tradition or poetry had given them.

"To think of your being a botanist!" exclaimed Flora, wondering at his knowledge.

"I should be a poor physician if I did not know as much about simples as an old woman. There was a time when the world was, for the most part, doctored by old women; Hecate-like hags who found healing—or sometimes death—in every hedge. There is hardly a leaf in yonder bank which might not be used for good or ill. Nature has no negatives."

The drive lasted a long time in this leisurely fashion, walking up all the hills, and walking down the steepest descents, loitering on lofty spots to admire the landscape, stopping at a roadside farmhouse for a draught of new milk, and otherwise dawdling, so that it was two o'clock when they mounted the last hill, and found themselves at the gate of the old burial-ground.

It would have been a sacrilegious thing to picnic among tombstones, so they carried the basket into a little bit of wood which bordered the old churchyard. The horse and vehicle were disposed of at an adjacent farmhouse—the only dwelling in sight of the church.

Utter silence reigned in the wood—silence and solemn beauty. Who can wonder that unenlightened man worshipped his deity in groves and woods? To every mind the forest has a sacred air, and seems the natural temple of the invisible God. Darkness and silence are his attributes, and here they reign perpetual.

Flora drew closer to her father, awed by the silence, as they entered this little world of shadow. That joyous spirit was suddenly clouded. Darkness and shadow reminded her of that awful shade which walks this world of ours, and hovers near us even in our gayest moments. She put her hand through Mark's arm, and looked up at his wan face.

"You are not tired, dearest papa?"

"No, Baby, not more tired than usual."

"That sounds as if you were always tired," she said anxiously.

"Well, darling, I don't pretend to be the fellow I was ten years ago in Queensland. But I mean to enjoy myself to-day for all that, so you needn't look unhappy, pretty one. Whatever span of life I have, remember that my later days have been very pleasant, and that you have made their sunshine—always remember that, little one."

Flora threw herself on his breast with a sob.

"Papa, papa, you pierce my heart when you speak like that, as if we were not to have many happy years together—as if God could be cruel enough to part us."

"We must never call God cruel," said Mark solemnly. "Remember Him who knew deeper sorrow than man's wildest grief, yet did not complain."

The girl choked back her tears, and clung even more fondly to the father's arm.

"After all," said Mark Chamney gaily, "I daresay when our parting does come it will be the sound of wedding-bells. My darling will think it no hardship to leave me when she departs with the husband of her choice."

"No, papa; no husband shall ever take me away from you! Whoever wants me for a wife must make his home in my father's house. But I am a poor little insignificant thing, and I don't suppose any one will ever want to marry me. I feel as if I was born to be an old maid. See how fond I am of canaries! That's an awful sign."

Mark Chamney laughed aloud—the old genial laugh which neither pain nor weakness had changed.

"Why, Baby, do you think I'm blind? Do you suppose I can't see the state of the case between you and Walter?"

"Papa," said Flora seriously, "he doesn't care a bit for me."

"Then I don't know what caring means."

"Indeed, papa, you are quite mistaken. He likes me very well, perhaps, as a younger sister; but no more than that, I know."

"Mistaken! pshaw! as if my eyes were not keener than yours. It's the lookers-on who see the most of the game, Flora. But perhaps you don't like him?"

Flora was silent. Her father looked down at the sweet young face suffused with blushes—eyelids drooping, with tears on their dark lashes.

"Never mind, darling; I won't ask for an answer. I know, and the future will show which of us was right. And now, no more serious talk to-day. You enjoyed the ride up here, Baby?"

"O, yes, papa; the scenery is so lovely."

"And Ollivant is a pleasant companion, eh?"

"A delightful companion, papa. I felt a little cross at first when we set out—"

"At not having Walter?"

"I did not say that."

"Of course not, Baby."

"But Dr. Ollivant talked so nicely that I couldn't help being interested. He seems to know everything, and understand everything—and he is so kind and thoughtful. I shall never be disagreeable about him again, papa."

"I'm very glad to hear that, Flora, for Ollivant and Leyburne are the only friends we have. Come, we had better make this our halting-place. The other two will find us presently."

The other two had remained behind to see to the horse, and carry the basket between them. The halting-place Mark had chosen was a little opening in the wood, which revealed the wide-spreading panorama beyond, as seen through an arch of

greenery. A tiny brook of clearest water rippled over the pebbles at their feet; a rugged bank crowned with tall pines offered a comfortable seat. Here Mark spread his furry rug, and stretched himself out in luxurious ease; while Flo's soprano voice called from a little knoll to give the basket-bearers notice of their destination. They arrived almost immediately, and the basket was unpacked with all the gaiety which usually attends the emptying of a picnic hamper. It was such a thoroughly silvan business altogether—the feast of the simplest—the banqueters the most temperate.

Dr. Ollivant, the grave physician, the man upon whom premature age was wont to sit as a garment, the recognised authority upon cardiac disease, was to-day the gayest, and, to all appearance, the happiest of the revellers. There was not enough alcohol in that modest bottle of *La Rose* which the three men shared among them to inspire a spurious merriment—it was all genuine mirth; and Mark listened and looked on admiringly, while Flora and the doctor talked. Walter, on the contrary, was more silent than usual. He was thinking of Loo's day in the country, and of what deep rapture such a scene as this would have inspired in that ardent soul. He remembered how she had spoken of *the Forest*, meaning Epping. It would have been pleasant to see her dark eyes glow with delight at sight of yonder wide sweep of hill and valley, verdure and woodland.

But it was a vain thought. Loo was treading the scholastic mill under the stern eye of Miss Tompion, and never more must he and she make holiday together.

The idea of her imprisonment, the memory of her last exploring look, saddened the painter in spite of himself. He hardly heard Flora's fresh young voice, or the doctor's graver tones. He began to feel tired of this holiday-life—tired even of Nature's beauty. The whole thing seemed childish. He turned from Dr. Ollivant with a scornful look, wondering that a man with some claim to intellectual distinction should be capable of finding delight in such foolish pleasures.

Mark Chamney noticed his moodiness.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Walter? You and Ollivant are like the old man and woman in the weather-glass—when one comes out, the other disappears. Your spirits were high enough yesterday, but now that Ollivant's here, they seem to have gone down to zero."

"I am not so learned as the doctor," sneered Walter, "and am not capable of enlightening Miss Chamney upon woodland traditions and superstitions with the eloquence and erudition which have distinguished his conversation this morning."

"Jealous!" thought Mark, pleased. "Poor fellow! He's

over head and ears in love with my little girl, and is jealous even of Ollivant."

Walter rose directly the simple feast was finished.

"I'll go for a ramble among the hills over there," he said, "while you all amuse yourselves exploring church and churchyard. I want to stretch my legs a little after that long drive."

Flora looked disappointed.

"Don't you want to see the church?" she exclaimed—"the oldest in England."

"I have no passion for old churches; but I'll come back in time for a look at it. We shan't leave here in a hurry, I suppose?"

"No, we can stay till five," answered Mark, looking at his watch. "It's just three. That gives you young people a couple of hours to amuse yourselves as you like. I shall indulge myself with a nap."

He made himself comfortable upon the rug, Flora assisting. She had forgotten nothing that could insure his comfort. She had brought an air pillow for his head, and the softest of Shetland shawls to enfold him in its fleecy web.

Not once did she look up at Walter as she knelt by the invalid's rustic couch. She, too, would have liked a ramble among those verdant hills; but it was not for her to propose it. She felt that he was unkind for wishing to leave her—that of all vain dreams her father's was vainest.

"Yet, only yesterday, I thought that he cared for me," she said to herself, with sorrowful resignation.

Walter lit his cigar, gave his friends a careless nod of farewell, and departed, promising to return in an hour.

Mark composed himself for slumber.

"You'd better take my little girl over the church," he said to the doctor; "that young fellow won't be back till it's time for us to start, I daresay. He's gone to think out some grand idea for a new picture, I'll be bound."

Flora sighed gently. Yes; that was it perhaps. True artists must live sometimes apart, in a kind of cloudland. It was wrong of her to feel vexed with Walter for liking a lonely ramble.

"Shall we go and explore the old church?" asked Dr. Ollivant, after an interval of placid silence. Mark Chamney was fast asleep by this time.

"If you please," said Flora, waking from a reverie. "If you think papa will be quite safe here."

"I do not think any danger can assail him. There is no treacherous east wind. We may safely leave him for half an hour, and we shall be within call if he wants us."

Flora rose, and they went away together, side by side. Ah, happy, if life could have gone on thus, thought the doctor. He would have asked no higher delight than the passionless joys of this summer afternoon.

A little gate opened out of the wood into the old burial-ground, and they went in among rustic tombstones, moss-grown, and decaying, with here and there a modern monument of higher pretensions, and here and there a humble wooden headboard with rudely-cut inscription. The ground was irregular; on one side of the church a sleepy hollow, sheltered by perfume-breathing limes, a chestnut or two, and a rugged old oak which spread its branches wide over one quiet corner; on the other side, an open plateau commanding a wide range of country.

The church looked like a forgotten church in a forgotten land. The ivy had pushed in among the decaying stones of the tower, loosening the masonry; time and weather had honeycombed the stones in some places, and a heap of fallen rubbish in one corner hinted at swift-coming ruin. The upper half of the tower had been patched with boards on the windward side, and the lower half, which had once been the entrance to the church, was occupied by a clay-stained barrow, a pickaxe and spade, and some loose planks—the gravedigger's dismal plant.

After making the circuit of the church they found the village guardian of the temple, a man who was at once sexton and gravedigger and gardener—not that this churchyard in the wilderness knew much of the gardener's care, but here and there he pegged up a wandering rose-brier, or cut down a bank of dock and thistle.

He led them into the church, whose interior presented no remarkable feature—save, indeed, a primeval simplicity suggestive of a departed age. There flourished, on tall slate tablets, the Ten Commandments; that pillar of faith by which old-fashioned churchmen stand stanchly in these days of change. The most evangelical mind might have been satisfied that here at least lurked no popish blandishments, no trappings of Rome. Bare benches, a pulpit like a packing-case, bare walls, rudely plastered, a brick floor, a cupboard for the sacred books, another cupboard for the parson's surplice, a tablet or two to the honour and glory of departed churchwardens who had made small bequests for the support of the church—no more. The ivy creeping in at the diamond-paned casements, the blue sky seen athwart the dark tracery of an over-shadowing yew—these were the only beautiful things to be seen in the church of Tadmor in the Wilderness. Flora's interest was soon exhausted. That dull gray interior suggested no romantic memories—only the idea of fat farmers and their families worshipping in that barn-

like edifice, Sunday after Sunday, with sluggish souls attuned to their sluggish lives.

They went back to the burial-ground, and here Flora found ample food for thought. She looked at the ages of the dead, and felt a little shock whenever she came to the record of some sleeper who had numbered less than her father's years when he was called away. Alas, how many, even in that rural region where death should be a tardy visitant, had been summoned in life's meridian! She turned from the tombstones with a shuddering sigh. The doctor, close at her side, and ever watchful of her face, noted look and sigh, and guessed the current of her thoughts.

"How hard that death should walk the world stealthily!" she said. "If there were one appointed hour for all to die, the common doom would be easier to bear. We should know the end must come, and prepare for it—prepare for death—prepare for parting. There would be no agony of suspense—no wavering hopes and fears. It is the surprise that is so cruel. Those we love are not taken from us in the course of nature, but snatched away unawares. Tread where we may, we are on the edge of a grave. The days of man are threescore years and ten, says the Scripture. But that is not true. Look at my father," she cried passionately, bursting into tears; "can you promise me that he will live to be seventy?"

Those tears unmanned the doctor. Passion, so long restrained, slipped the leash. In a moment he was on his knees upon the grassy mound, clasping Flora's hands as she leaned against the sunken headstone, covering the poor little hands with kisses.

"My love, be comforted!" he cried; "God will not leave you desolate. If one great love must be taken from you, there shall be another—greater, stronger, more utterly devoted—to replace the lost affection. My darling, don't shrink from me like that. There never was a woman loved better than I love you—rarely a woman loved so well. You must have guessed it—you must have known it—even though to your mind I seem old and grave, and outside the pale of love and hope. Flora, pity me!"

That last appeal—a cry of anguish so utter—touched her in spite of her pained surprise.

"Pity you, Dr. Ollivant?" she said gently. "I do indeed pity you, if you can be so foolish—if there is any meaning in this wild talk."

"Meaning! It is the one meaning of my life. I never carried away the memory of a woman's face till I saw yours. The loveliest have passed before me like pictures in a gallery, or making even less impression on my mind. But I saw you—I knew you—watched all your pretty looks, your gentle womanly

ways—and my mind opened to the understanding of a new world. Love and hope and home and wife and children—the idlest words men speak had not been empty words for me till then. I knew you, and home and wife became the one purpose of my existence. God knows I have tried to do without that vain dream — to live without you; but I cannot — I cannot. If you will not be my wife, there is nothing before me but misery.”

“I am so sorry,” faltered Flora, very pale—frightened by the force of this passion, so terrible in its stern reality; not in the least like any lover’s talk she had ever imagined—“sincerely sorry that you should think of anything so impossible. Pray be reasonable, dear Dr. Ollivant; remember the difference of our ages.”

“It did not hinder my loving you—it would not prevent my making your life happy—if you would only trust me. I would be husband and father in one; protector, guide. Your youth, your innocence, your gentle yielding nature, need a stronger helpmate than some boy-lover whom you might choose for the brightness of his glance, the sunlight on his hair. Boy-and-girl love is a pretty thing in poetry, Flora, but poor stuff to stand the wear and tear of life. Trust a love that is the outcome of manhood, the fruit of a ripened mind, rather than that careless fancy of youth which is fleeting as the foam upon a shallow river.”

“O, dear,” said Flora, in sheer distress of mind, “what can you see in me—a poor little insignificant creature that no one notices? You who are so clever—you who know everything.”

“I never knew love till I knew you, Flora, or youth, or hope. You brought me the bloom of my late youth. At the time when other men are young, I was old. I am as young as the youngest now. The heart is the true timekeeper.”

“You are so good, so wise, so true a friend to papa,” faltered Flora, half frightened, half flattered. There was a thrilling sense of power, of her own importance, in finding herself loved like this—a novel intoxication. Her glance softened, the tender curve of her lip relaxed into a gentle smile. She was sorry for the doctor’s infatuation—a little proud of having inspired a passion so romantic. “If I had never known any one else——” she said hesitatingly.

“If you had never known *him!*” cried Cuthbert, hope rekindled by her softness, and with hope jealous anger. “If I had come first, and come alone, I might have had my chance. He robbed me—he who is incapable of an honest love.”

“How dare you say that?” exclaimed Flora, flaming out. No name had been spoken—no name was needed to indicate

the subject of their speech. "What right have you to set yourself up as his judge?"

"No right, Flora, but some experience of mankind. It is not hate or jealousy that speaks when I tell you that Walter Leyburne is incapable of a noble self-sacrificing love. It is conviction. 'Unstable in all things, thou shalt not excel.' He will never be a famous painter, for he is not true to his art. He will never be a faithful lover, for he has no constancy of purpose. He is that shifting sand which never bore a noble edifice. He is that wandering star of whom the apostle speaks: 'Clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.'"

"It is shameful of you to speak against him; shameful, cowardly to depreciate him in his absence; and to quote scripture against him, as if St. Jude had any unkind feeling about poor Walter," added Flora, restraining her tears with a struggle. "Mr. Leyburne is nothing to me, or, at the most, only a friend; but I detest people who speak against my friends."

"Then you detest me, Flora?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry for that."

"I detest you when you are unjust and unkind," said Flora, half relenting. "Of course I can't altogether hate you, for you are papa's friend—his doctor too. You hold the keys of life and death, perhaps. O, be kind to him—take care of him! Don't punish me by neglecting him."

"Am I quite a dastard? Flora, if the waste of all my life could prolong your father's for a year beyond God's limit, I would surrender my life as freely for your pleasure as if it were a cup of water given to a thirsty wayfarer. What sacrifice of self would I not make for your sake—ay, even to the last worst sacrifice of all—to see you happy with another? On my soul and honour, if I had thought Walter Leyburne the man to render your life happy, this wild prayer of to-day should have remained unspoken. I would have locked my lips. No temptation—not even the sight of your tears—should have beguiled me from my steadfast silence. I would have gone down to the grave, adoring you to the last hour of my life, but with my love untold. I have strength and will and courage enough even for that, Flora."

"I know you are great. I believe you are good," answered the girl, looking up at him with wondering eyes, awed by the depth and strength of his passion; "too good to make me unhappy by talking of this foolish love—so foolish since I am so unworthy of it."

"No, you are more than worthy. What is there on this

earth better than youth and innocence for a man to adore? My tender violet, fresh and bright with the dew of life's morning, no ripe red rose that ever flaunted her beauty in the mid-day sun owns your gentle charm. O, Flora, can you not choose between a weak wavering fancy like Walter Leyburne's and a love so strong as mine? Alas, you know not how much I renounce for your sake, how sternly I had planned my career, and how little room there was in the plan of it for an absorbing passion. I never thought that love could be needful to my life till I knew you. You have awakened a dormant soul, Flora; you are bound to cherish, to succour it. Do not thrust it from you to perish in outer darkness. For me there is no medium between delight and despair—the blessedness of being loved by you and the blank misery of existence without you."

His words took deeper meaning from the sombre fire of his dark eyes—the utter intensity of look and action—the hand which clasped Flora's with a grip of iron, every vein defined in the white surface—every muscle rigid. Physiologists might have read the man's soul from no better indication than that firm strong hand. A man born to set himself against the impossible—resolute to recklessness, if need were.

"O, dear," exclaimed Flora piteously, "I don't know what to say, I don't know what to do! It is such a shock to me to hear you go on like this, Dr. Ollivant, when I have always looked up to you and respected you, and been grateful to you for papa's sake. I beg you never to repeat this wild talk. Let us forget that you ever talked so. I hope you'll be happy by-and-by, and find some good clever wife, who will suit you ever so much better than a foolish little thing like me."

"Flora, if I had come first—if you had never known Walter Leyburne, would there have been any hope for me then?" he asked desperately, ignoring her wise little lecture.

"I am afraid not. You see, you are so many years older than I am. I don't think I ever could have thought of you in that light, even if——"

"Even if you had not loved Walter Leyburne," said the doctor.

"You have no right to say that. You know that Mr. Leyburne is nothing to me."

"God grant he may never be any more to you than he is now!"

"It would make no difference in my feelings towards you," cried Flora indignantly.

"God grant it for your own sake," said the doctor with a moody look.

He rose from the green hillock on which he had been kneeling all this time at the girl's feet, holding her slender wrist

with that strong hand of his, constraining her to hear him to the end. He rose with a gloomy look upon his rigid face, and turned away from her. It was all over. He had said his say—prayed his prayer. He knew no farther plea that he could make. His glimmer of hope—the pale ray that had lured him on till now—was extinguished for ever.

He was not angry with Flora for her refusal. That might, love he bore her, passionate though it might be, was not the kind of love which failure and disappointment can transform to hatred. He might detest his happy rival, but for Flora he had no feeling save tenderness.

She stood by the headstone, hardly daring to look up, while Dr. Ollivant moved a pace or two away from her. She was angry with him for his depreciation of Walter, but sorry for his foolish infatuation. Never before had she seen grief or passion in a man. It was like being brought face to face with some inhabitant of a strange world. Pity and wonder divided her mind.

“Flora,” said a light gay voice at her elbow.

She looked round with a start and a faint cry of gladness.

“O, Walter, is it you?”

“Yes; I’ve had a long ramble, and come back to show you the church.”

“You’re very kind,” replied Flora with dignity; “I’ve seen the church, and I’m quite ready to go back to papa.”

She had forgotten his bad conduct at first, in her delight at seeing him. It had been such a relief to hear his voice, to see his frank smile, after that awful look of Dr. Ollivant’s as he turned his gloomy face away from her just now.

“Then perhaps you’ll show me the church. I suppose, having come here for the express purpose of seeing the place, one is in a manner bound to see it. That’s the worst of a picnic; the drive is delightful, the luncheon is always agreeable; but the lion to be done afterwards is generally a bore.”

“I don’t think you can see the church unless you grope your way in through some door that’s been left unlocked by accident. The man who keeps the keys has gone home, and he lives three miles away. He told us so.”

“Communicative creature! In that case we’ll consider the church done. Any remarkable monuments in the churchyard?”

“Yes, a poor little freestone cross in memory of a landscape painter whom the nation might honour with a nobler memorial,” said Dr. Ollivant, looking round. “Go and look at his grave, Mr. Leyburne, and see how easily even greatness may be forgotten. His pictures fetch large sums at Christie’s; but the grass grows high upon the mound under which he sleeps, upon

the slope of a westward-fronting hill, in the glow of the sunsets he loved to paint."

Nothing in the doctor's calm tone indicated the struggle of the past half-hour. He possessed that heroism of daily life, the power of keeping his emotions in check. Strong must have been that spring-tide of passion which had carried away the floodgates of prudence a little while ago.

They went to look at the painter's grave, which Dr. Ollivant had discovered by chance among the humble memorials of village tradesmen and tenant farmers. The afternoon sunlight bathed the spot in its soft golden glow. It was not a bad resting-place; better perhaps, save for the credit of the nation, than Westminster Abbey.

"I should like to go back to papa, please," said Flora. "He must have finished his nap by this time."

"Then we'll go to him. How pale you are looking, Flora!" cried the painter. "The oldest church in England has been too much for you."

"I do feel rather tired."

"Poor little fragile flower! and I have been to the top of that hill over there, and feel none the worse for the journey."

Flora and Walter went back to the wood where they had picknicked, leaving Dr. Ollivant alone in the churchyard. He was moving slowly among the turf-bound graves, an image of gloomy meditation, not inappropriate to the scene.

They found Mr. Chamney seated on a pile of pine-trunks, smoking his cigar and contemplating the landscape with a look of serene thoughtfulness. He had been meditating upon that one subject which lay nearest his heart—his little girl's future. To him it seemed clear and bright enough, despite Flora's doubts. He welcomed them with a smile.

"What! you two have been together all the time, after all?"

"I have been to the other end of the world—at least to the top of that hill over there," said Walter; "and then I made a circumambulation and got back to the churchyard, but not in time to show Miss Chamney the church. Dr. Ollivant had anticipated me."

"Well, I think we'd better get off as soon as we can, if you've all had enough of Tadmor in the Wilderness. There's a high tea or something ordered for eight o'clock, isn't there, Baby?"

"Yes, papa?"

"It's nearly six, and the drive takes two hours; but we won't spoil a pleasant day by hurrying the close of it. Where's Ollivant?"

"Ruminating upon the end of life among village graves. We did not presume to disturb his solemn meditations, but I know where to look for him when the wagonette's ready."

They strolled slowly through the little wood and went into the farmyard, where Flora fell in love with a mild-faced Devonian cow, ruddy as the rich soil on which she was pastured, and admired all the varieties of a farmyard life with the fresh enthusiasm of a city maiden, while the horse was being harnessed.

When all was ready, they found Dr. Ollivant at the churchyard gate, serious, courteous as of old, and bearing no trace of that consuming flame which had transformed him less than an hour ago. He was more silent than usual during the homeward drive, but none the less tender in his care of Flora. Gentle was the hand with which he adjusted her shawls and wraps, lest the evening breeze should be too chill for her safety, gravely sweet his tones when he spoke to her.

Once something in the expression of his face touched her unawares. She looked up suddenly, and surprised his look of infinite love.

"Perhaps, after all, he is right," she thought, deeply moved by that revelation of despairing love. "If I had never known Walter I might have learnt to care for him, were it only out of gratitude for such deep affection. What would it have mattered to me that he is ever so many years older than I? He honours me so much the more by his regard. Yes, I might have loved him a little, I daresay, if I had never known Walter."

CHAPTER XVI.

*"Allez, soyez heureuse ; oubliez-moi bien vite,
Comme le chérubin oublia le lévite
Qui l'avait vu passer et traverser les cieux."*

THE emotions of that afternoon in Tadmor churchyard proved a little too much for Miss Chamney's strength, and she was confined to her room next morning with a severe headache. Perhaps, too, she shrank somewhat from a meeting with the doctor. All the easy familiarity of their past intercourse was

over. She dreaded any allusion to that hopeless passion which gave him a new character in her mind. He was no longer the safe middle-aged friend, a kind of adopted uncle. All future companionship with him must be fraught with fear.

The morning after the picnic—disagreeably distinguished from all other mornings by Flora's absence—was spent by the three gentlemen in a somewhat desultory manner. Mr. Chamney lay on the sofa by the open window, reading yesterday's papers. The doctor went for a purposeless ramble on the cliff, intending to return at noon to write letters in the little room behind the drawing-room, which had been given up to his use. Walter went down to the beach to sketch and smoke for an hour or two, after his lazy holiday-making fashion.

The doctor walked far, following the irregular line of the coast, across cornfield and fallow, pasture and common land. The spot where he halted was the wildest, most desolate bit of the landscape; an angle where the cliff rose highest, and the descent, although not absolutely sheer, was steep enough to make the lonely wanderer recoil from the verge with a shudder.

From this height the land sloped downward at a sharp incline and the cliff came to an end. Beyond this the coast was low and level, and a rough tract of sandy heath extended to the very edge of the sea. On the other side of this heathy waste glimmered the white walls of the coastguard station. Dr. Ollivant lingered on the height, looking dreamily across the wide calm blue of the summer sea, and thinking whether he had not made a mistake about his life, after all.

"I have enclosed my life in too narrow a circle," he thought; "I have denied myself too many things—all those things which other men consider the necessary embellishments of existence—and now I pay the price of my onesidedness. At seven-and-thirty I am the slave of a girl, only at rest in her company—and yet not at rest even with her. A bitter end to high hopes—a barren reward for a youth of toil and patience."

It did seem a hard thing to him that he who had asked so little of Providence, who had toiled so abundantly for the prizes he had wrested from Fortune, should be denied this one boon. He only sighed for the affection of a gentle girl—not eminently beautiful, not richly gifted in mind or person; only to him the loveliest and dearest thing in the universe.

To him and to his boundless love Fate denied her, and gave her to a man whose affection for her—even if he cared for her at all—was at best an ephemeral fancy, to be turned aside by the first temptation. The doctor had watched Walter Leyburne, and, without any knowledge of the man's life, knew enough of the man himself to be very sure that he had no absorbing love for Flora.

"But then, unhappily, she is in love with him," reflected Dr. Ollivant. "I knew that it would be so the first time I saw them together."

He walked slowly homeward. Hours were of little account to him at Branscomb. He had a volume of modern medicine—the last new ideas of Germany—in his pocket, but did not care to read to-day. For once in his life he was his own master, and tasted all the pleasures of idleness; or such pleasure as that idler tastes who walks with black Care close behind him.

The London post did not leave Branscomb till six in the evening, so there was plenty of time for the doctor to write his letters without unduly hastening his footsteps. It was between two and three when he opened the gate of the Cedars, and walked across the grass to the open window of his own little sanctum, wondering whether Flora had yet appeared, and if he had lost the delight of seeing her at luncheon. That substantial midday meal would be over most likely by this time.

He paused on the threshold of the window by which he was in the habit of going in and out, brought to a sudden standstill by the sound of one short sentence in Mark Chamney's voice. The door between the two rooms was ajar, and Mark was speaking in tones that made every word audible.

"If I had not thought that you were fond of my little girl, I should never have broached the subject," he said.

"As if any one could help being fond of her," replied Mr. Leyburne, with the faintest suspicion of embarrassment in his accents. "It isn't possible to live with her, and see her sweet nature, and not admire and love her as——"

He had been going to say "as a sister," but the eager father interrupted him.

"As you do," he exclaimed. "I was positive of it. Haven't I seen it in a thousand signs and tokens? Didn't I tell Flora so?"

"You told her?" said the other; "and did she——"

"She was delighted. My dear fellow, she adores you. You've nothing to fear in that quarter. I think she was in love with you before I brought you into the house. I remember how bright and happy the little puss was when I told her about our meeting at Maravilla's; how she stood on tiptoe to kiss me, as if I'd done something wonderfully clever; and how she insisted upon going straight off in a cab to Covent-garden, to buy fruit and flowers to make the table look pretty. You're a happy fellow, Walter. It is not one man in a hundred who gets such a wife as Flora—a young fresh soul—pure as a little child—spontaneous—unselfish—confiding. I ought not to praise her so much, perhaps, because she's my own daughter—but—you're right, Walter—who could live with her—see her day by day,

with all her unconscious graces—and not idolize her? Well, I won't say any more about Flora. She is just what Heaven made her, untaught and unspoiled by the world. I thank God heartily for having brought us all together; for there is no one I would rather have for my son-in-law, no one to whom I would rather leave my hard-won fortune, than Jack Ferguson's nephew."

"My dear Mr. Chamney," faltered the painter, "I know not how to be grateful enough for your regard—your confidence."

"Be faithful to my child when these eyes can no longer see your love," answered Mark, after a pause in which the two men had joined hands in friendship's cordial grasp; "be kind to her and true to her when I am gone. God only knows how soon that day may come. I have had many a warning to remind me that my time is short, or I should hardly have spoken as I have to-day. I hope you don't think I make my little girl cheap by speaking out so bluntly. If I had not been certain about your feelings, I should have held my tongue. But I want to be very sure that my darling's future will be safe and happy before I lie down to take my last long rest. I may trust you, mayn't I, Walter? If I have made any mistake, if there is a shade of doubt or hesitation in your mind, speak out. I can bear my disappointment, and my little girl is made of too sound a metal to break her heart because her first love-dream may be nothing more than a dream."

"I have no doubt—no hesitation. If I have ever wavered, I shall waver no longer," exclaimed Walter with hearty eagerness which seemed sincere even to the ear of that pale and breathless listener standing by the half-open door. "I thank you with all my soul for your confidence," continued the young man, "and it will go hard with me if I do not prove in some measure worthy of so great a trust. God grant that you may live long enough to see that you have made no error in choosing me for the guardian of your darling's life."

All was settled. Dr. Ollivant gave one long sigh—a sigh of farewell to hope—pushed open the door, and went into the dining-room, where Mr. Chamney and Mr. Leyburne were still seated opposite each other at the luncheon table.

"I'm afraid the cutlets are cold, Ollivant," said Mark gaily, "but we'll soon get you a fresh supply. Ring the bell, Walter, like a good fellow. In the meantime, you may congratulate me, my dear doctor, upon having settled a question that lies very near my heart—a question which I have more than once discussed with you."

"You need not explain," replied the doctor. "I came in by the window of the study a few minutes ago, and heard some

part of your conversation—enough to make me understand the position of affairs,”

By this avowal Dr. Ollivant in some degree protected himself from the degradation of having been a listener.

“What! you overheard us?” exclaimed Mark, astonished.

“Yes; I did not like to interrupt Mr. Leyburne’s pretty speech just now, so waited on the other side of the door till he had finished. I congratulate you, young gentleman; and I trust you may be able to keep the promises you made so glibly.”

“I am not afraid of myself,” answered Walter loftily, “however poor an opinion you may entertain of my merits. And I really do not see that Mr. Chamney’s choice of a son-in-law is any business of yours. Unless indeed,” with a crushing sneer, “you had some idea of applying for the situation yourself.”

“That hypothesis is not impossible,” replied the doctor coolly. “But I have a better ground for my anxiety about Miss Chamney’s happiness in the fact that until to-day I considered myself her future guardian.”

“And so you are,” said Mark eagerly. “Don’t suppose that Flora’s marriage will make any difference in my wishes upon that point. I am not going to trust this inexperienced young couple with full custody of their own fortunes. Flora’s money shall be tied up as tightly as lawyers can tie it; so that if Walter likes to make ducks and drakes of John Ferguson’s savings, mine shall give him and his wife an income no folly of theirs can alienate. You shall be trustee to the marriage settlement. You’ve no objection to Dr. Ollivant in that capacity, I suppose, Walter?”

“Not the slightest; though I must needs regret that I have not been so fortunate as to earn the doctor’s good opinion.”

“My opinions are always liable to be modified or altered by time,” said Dr. Ollivant frigidly.

He seated himself at the table, drank a glass of claret, and listened graciously while Mr. Chamney unfolded his plans for the future; Walter sitting in the verandah outside, smoking, and only putting in a word now and then.

No schoolboy enraptured by the possession of his first watch, his first gun, or his first pony, could have been more delighted than Mark at having secured a happy future for his child. He had no shadow of doubt as to the wisdom of his own plan. All seemed clear to him now. It would be hard to part with Flora, but to know her safe was to take the sting out of death.

“They can begin housekeeping in Fitzroy-square,” he said; “it will only be for Walter to move his painting-room from

number eleven to number nine. I'll make the house bright and pretty for them. You're right, Cuthbert, in what you once said about it; it is a gloomy den for such an occupant as Flora. I'll have the principal rooms refurnished, and keep the back drawing-room and the bedroom above it for my own hole. You won't grudge me so much space in that big house, will you, Leyburne?"

"I should be wretched if you thought of living anywhere else," said Walter from the verandah.

"That's heartily spoken. I should be miserable if you parted me from Flora. But I'm not going to be a prying old nuisance of a father-in-law. I shall keep pretty close in my own den, and by-and-by you can take Flora to Italy, and show her all the wonders of the Old World. I promised myself that pleasure once. I made up my mind Baby and I would wander all over Europe together, and perhaps cross from Naples to Africa, and have a peep at the Moors. But Fate decreed otherwise. I must be content to lie at ease on my sofa, and smoke my cigar, and follow your footsteps in my dreams."

There was a pathos in his resignation all the deeper from the cheeriness of his tone. Both his hearers were touched.

"We shall be in no hurry to leave you, sir, even for the delight of seeing Rome together," said Walter.

"We." How easily he uttered the plural pronoun; how completely settled the matter seemed! The doctor, who had despised this young man's instability of character, wondered at the change an hour had wrought in look, tone, and manner. To-day Walter Leyburne seemed steadfast as a rock.

Flora came in at this moment, pale as her white muslin dress, and with a pensive look that went to the doctor's heart. That wild avowal of his had shaken her nerves, nay, agitated her soul to its utmost depths. She had lain awake all night thinking of him, wondering about him, haunted by that last despairing look of his, the gloomy darkness of his eyes just before he turned from her in the churchyard. He had been subdued and calm enough afterwards, but through all that long wakeful night she could not recall his face without that awful look, that fixed and sullen agony of a soul without hope.

Was this true love, the best and noblest love that could be offered to a woman? She told herself with a sigh that, if it were, she could never be truly loved by Walter Leyburne. Looking back at the past few months by the new light of that afternoon's revelation, she could see that Dr. Ollivant had always loved her better, or at least loved her more deeply, than his bright young rival. Walter had been kind enough and pleasant enough in his butterfly fashion, but Cuthbert Ollivant's devotion had known no limit. What dull evenings, what

monotonous days he had endured for her sake, knowing no weariness while she was at his side! How tender he had been towards her ignorance, how patient a teacher, how unselfish a friend!

She sighed as she recalled all his goodness—sighed with pitying tenderness, and wished there had been no such person as Walter, and that she could have rewarded that devoted love.

"I would not have minded his being so old," she said to herself. "I would have been his wife and daughter at once, and would have thought a life of duty and obedience a poor payment for his goodness to papa and me."

Unhappily Mr. Leyburne did exist, and his existence made up half the sum of Flora's narrow world.

That pale look of hers this morning thrilled Cuthbert Ollivant's soul. It told of sleeplessness and thought for his sake. Alas, she knew not that her fate had been decided in her absence. Very soon that pallor would be changed for maiden blushes, those sad eyes would brighten with a happy smile. Very soon would she have forgotten how to pity her rejected lover.

"Well, my pet, is the head better?" asked Mark Chamney, as his daughter kissed him. "I hope I sent you up a nice breakfast."

"Very nice, papa, and substantial enough for a couple of ploughmen, instead of one young lady with a headache. But I ate a few of those magnificent strawberries, and enjoyed them."

"That's right, darling. The doctor brought those in from the village on purpose for you. The basket was a perfect picture."

"Thank you, Dr. Ollivant. How kind of you!" she said, stealing a timid look at him. It was so difficult to speak to him in the ordinary careless tones, after that scene of yesterday.

"You're sure the head is better?" Mark asked anxiously, still holding his daughter's hand.

"A little, papa; yes, nearly well. I think I had too much air and sunshine yesterday. It is only the birds who can bear the full glory of a midsummer day."

"Go out and sit in the garden, Baby; it's cool on the east side of the house. Leyburne will read to you, I daresay," suggested Mr. Chamney, smiling at his own finesse. What manœuvring mother could have managed things better?

"Delighted," said Walter, flinging his half-smoked cigar into blue space towards the sea-gulls. "What shall it be—Shelley or Browning or Walt Whitman?"

"I suppose she wouldn't think it poetry if it was anything she could understand," remarked Mr. Chamney. "In my young days Byron used to be good enough for people."

"Yes," drawled Walter, "there are people still living who think there are pretty bits in Byron."

He remembered that first reading of the *Giaour* in Voysey-street, and Loo's passionate burst of weeping. That strong verse—innocent of metaphysical depths of meaning, or intricate entanglement of words—has a wonderful effect upon vulgar minds.

"O, Shelley, if you please," said Flora. She was at the age when Shelley is the most adorable of poets, when to sit in a garden above the sea, and follow the pensive meanderings of that melodious verse, is to be in paradise. And if just the one dearest companion earth can give reads the musical lines in a low baritone, Shelley is twice Shelley.

She kissed her father again, looked into his face with fond anxiety, and was cheered by its gladness.

"You look so well to-day, papa," she exclaimed, "ever so much better than yesterday. Doesn't he, Dr. Ollivant?"

"I am better, my dear," replied Mark, not waiting for the doctor's opinion; "I never was better, or more at ease in my life. God bless you, darling! Go and be happy with—Shelley."

She made the doctor a little curtsey of adieu, and vanished through the open window, taking the sunlight with her, as it seemed to those two who remained in the room.

"Now, Ollivant, I daresay you are going to pitch into me," said Mark, putting himself on the defensive, as soon as Dr. Ollivant and he were alone.

"I am not going to do anything of the kind. You have done what you thought wisest for your daughter's happiness. Can I complain if she is happy?"

CHAPTER XVII.

**"Das Ausserordentliche in dem Leben
 Hat keine Regel, keinen Zwang; es bringt
 Sich sein Gesetz und seine Tugend mit:
 Man darf es nicht mit ird'schen Wage messen;
 Man zäumt es nicht mit ird'schen Schranken ein."**

THE reading of Shelley ended as might have been foreseen by any reasonable person with full knowledge of the circumstances. Before he had gone very far into the misty labyrinth of "Epipsychidion" Walter laid down his book, took Flora's willing hand in his, and asked her to be his wife. It was all done in the simplest, easiest way. The young man indulged in no heroics—he had been a great deal more eloquent that moonlight night on the Kingston road, where the mystic light and the ghostly whisper of the pines were natural aids and incentives to poetic expression. He only told Flora in the plainest words that she was the sweetest girl he had ever known, and that he had her father's sanction for his wooing.

"More than his sanction, darling," he said; "your father wishes it with all his heart."

"But are you sure that you wish it, Walter?" asked Flora earnestly. "It is just a romantic notion of papa's that you and I ought to be married because you are Mr. Ferguson's nephew. Don't let papa's wish influence your conduct. Wait till your own heart speaks; and if that remains silent, let us be brother and sister to the end of our lives."

"My heart spoke ever so long ago; my heart has been continually speaking," said Walter, very much in earnest at this moment. He fully believed just now that he had never cared for any one but Flora—that his transient admiration of somebody else had been nothing more than an artist's worship of unconventional beauty. "Flora, you are not going to say no, when every one wishes you to say yes; you do care for me a little, don't you?" pleaded the lover.

Flora's eyes had been hidden till this moment, hidden by the shadow of her little plumed hat; but at this question she lifted her head and looked at the questioner—shyly, but with ineffable love in those clear truthful eyes.

"Yes, I knew you loved me!" said Walter, putting his arm round her with the successful suitor's proprietorial air, and

kissing the fresh young lips—a deliberate legitimate kiss, not like that rifled kiss in the dark lane at Thames Ditton.

“And now, darling, there is nothing to hinder our being married as soon as ever your papa likes. We might spend our honeymoon on the shores of the Mediterranean, or among the Ionian Isles, and take Mr. Chamney with us. So easy a journey as that could hardly hurt him, and he would escape the fogs and east winds of an English autumn.”

Flora, whose mind was not bound up in the garments she wore, made no objection on the score of trousseau, as most modern damsels with rich fathers would have done. So these two children began to plan their future at once, seated side by side on the grassy bank sheltered by sparse laurels and scanty firs, with all the vast blue sea spread out before them.

* * * * *

Dr. Ollivant bore the certainty of defeat with an external calmness which might fairly have been expected from his strong nature. He saw Flora and her lover together, knowing that they were to be together for all the years to come, and gave no sign of his agony. He was more cordial in his manner to Walter than he had ever been yet, as if he were trying his hardest to like him. To Flora he was gentle, courteous, and paternal. Seeing him as he was now, she could hardly believe that he was the same man who had pleaded his love with such passionate force in Tadmor churchyard. The Dr. Ollivant of that never-to-be-forgotten hour had vanished, like the spectral visitant of a dream. She was grateful to him for his kindness, and showed her gratitude by many little tokens of regard; but she took good care never to be alone with him, even for a few minutes, lest he should break out again. He was no longer that strong rock of shelter in which she had confided as a bulwark of defence, but a Vesuvius liable to explode at any moment.

Stoic as he might be, the doctor did not think fit to prolong the task of endurance farther than was needful to give decency to his departure. He felt that he would be better in the vault-like study in Wimpole-street, walled-in with books, feeding on the dry bones of science, or dining in the gloomy dining-room, with all the memorials of Long Sutton around him, all eloquent of his joyless boyhood, from the portrait of his father—seated at a table with a stethoscope and a surgical-instrument case at his elbow, and the regulation crimson curtain behind him—to the brass-bound sarcophagus in which his thrifty mother kept the decanters.

He announced his departure for the second day after that of the betrothal, much to Mark's regret.

"What a bird of passage you are, Cuthbert!" he exclaimed. "I thought you meant to stop ever so much longer!"

"My dear Chamney, you forget the impatience of patients, who get that name like the groves—a *non lucendo*. I should pass into the herd of unfashionable physicians before the year was out if I abandoned my consulting-room any longer. For the rest," he added, in a tone that was almost gay, "I shall be ready to assume any responsibility that you like to inflict upon me in regard to Miss Chamney's settlement."

"Miss Chamney!"

"Flora, if you prefer it," said the doctor, hardly daring to pronounce that name, lest his accent should betray him. He could not breathe her Christian name without a tender cadence in the syllables. "And whenever the wedding-day is fixed, you may command my attendance."

"Thanks, dear old fellow! But I'm not the less sorry to lose you now. As the distance to the goal shortens, one clings more kindly to one's travelling companions. I suppose my little girl will be married in London—at St. Pancras perhaps; a big cheerless temple for a quiet little wedding; but it will do. I daresay she'll want to buy gowns and things; what you call a trousseau. Curious that a woman about to marry should deem it necessary to provide herself with a pile of garments as big as a haystack, as if she cherished the conviction that her husband would never give her any clothes."

"The custom is convenient, when the brokers come in within the first year of the marriage," said the doctor placidly; "it provides something to be seized, and gives tone to the statement of the husband's assets."

The next day was Dr. Ollivant's last at Branscomb, and promised to be a blank and dreary day; for Mr. Chamney had one of those intervals of prostration which were too common to him now, and Flora spent the morning by her father's sofa, reading to him or watching him in his brief and fitful slumbers.

The two visitors therefore were flung upon their own resources for amusement. The weather was divine; true midsummer weather, with a high cloudless sky, and the balmiest west wind that ever fluttered the tresses of the sea-nymphs. The doctor and Mr. Leyburne sauntered forth in a purposeless manner, and with tacit agreement to avoid each other, took separate ways.

The painter went down to the beach to finish that little picture he was painting for Mr. Chamney. The doctor strolled through the village, took a long round inland, and returned to the coast by narrow field-paths, which led him to that wilder region which had pleased his fancy when he discovered it two days ago.

He had walked a long way before he came to the spot where the dark red cliffs rose highest, and it was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. He had been thinking deeply, throughout that solitary ramble, doing battle with his weak heart, and he felt himself in some measure victorious in that mental struggle. It was easier to fight the battle now that all was settled—all the possibilities which exist while a question is yet undecided ended for ever. He schooled himself to think of Flora's marriage as an event that must take place very soon. He pictured to himself their future relations. He, the grave friend and adviser—guardian of her material welfare—sponsor to her first-born. He could not imagine that inevitable future without a pang; but he told himself these things must be, and that he must be less than a man if he did not face these contingencies in a manly spirit.

"To think that I, who have written on cardiac diseases, should suffer my heart to be racked by that disease called love—hopeless love for a girl of nineteen!"

At the highest point of the cliff there was a straggling hedge dividing two fields—on one side a wide sweep of fallow, on the other a stretch of feathery oats. The doctor, tired with seven or eight miles' hard walking, laid himself down to rest on a low bank under the shelter of this hedge, and had soon dozed off into that light noon-day slumber in which the hum of the summer insects, the flutter of leaves, the deep-toned murmur of the sea, are pleasantly audible to the sleeper. He hears the harmony of the universe, and fancies himself lying in the lap of Nature, soothed by her tender cradle-song.

But a harsher sound than the silver-clear note of the skylark in the blue vault above presently startled the doctor from his slumber—a voice which he knew, raised angrily, exclaiming,—

"It's a lie!"

"Is it?" asked another voice, in a still harsher tone, a voice whose quality was somewhat rough and husky, as if with too much tobacco and too much strong drink. "Where is she then? What have you done with her? What have you done with my daughter?"

Cuthbert Ollivant started to his feet, pale and eager, and looked to see whence the voices came. Two men were walking along the edge of the cliff, a few paces in front of him. They must have passed close to him as he lay asleep under the hedge. One was Walter Leyburne; the other, a man who looked half-gipsy, half seaman, roughly clad, and with a bold swaggering walk. This was all Dr. Ollivant could see as the man walked in front of him.

He followed within earshot. He had no doubts as to his justification in hearing what this stranger had to say to Walter

Leyburne. He had heard enough to justify his listening to the rest.

"You have no occasion to be alarmed," said Walter coolly; "you need give yourself no uneasiness about the daughter to whom you were so indulgent a father, so devoted a protector. She is in safe keeping."

"Yes, I've no doubt of it," answered the other, with a harsh laugh; "in uncommonly safe keeping."

"Wherever she is, I recognize no right of yours to question me about her, or to follow her. When you turned her out of doors that night, you forfeited all claim to her love, or duty, or obedience."

"I should never have turned her out if I hadn't had good reason for it. You can't suppose it didn't go against me, as a father, to do such a thing. There wasn't a better girl than our Loo in all Voysey-street till you came about us—industrious, hard-working, an affectionate daughter, and a thoroughly respectable young woman. But from the time you crossed her path she was ruined—lolloping about with a book in her lap every spare minute she could get—sitting up late at nights, and souring the old lady's temper by burning the candles. There were plenty of people in Voysey-street to see the change, and some of 'em friendly enough to give me a word of honest advice about it. 'Are you blind, Jarred?' they said. 'Can't you see what's going on?' But even when they spoke out plain about you and Loo, it didn't frighten me. 'I know he's a noble-hearted fellow and a thorough gentleman,' said I. 'If he pays our Loo attentions that can can only be paid by a lover, he means fair, and he'll make a lady of her. I'm not afraid of him. He's as true as steel.' That's what I said, Mr. Leyburne. Come now, don't prove me a liar after all. I've travelled all the way from London to ask you a plain question. Do you mean to make an honest woman of my daughter? Are you going to marry her?"

Walter's reply was in a lower key, and the doctor was not near enough to hear it. But the stranger's answer to that speech, which seemed long and deliberate, came in a voice of thunder.

"Blackguard and profligate!" he cried, with a threatening motion of his clenched fist. "I'll have it out of you somehow. You carry it off with a high hand, but you haven't seen the last of Jarred Gurner."

For a moment his attitude looked as if he meant violence, but in the next he turned sharply away, and ran along the cliff and down the incline that led to the sand-hills and furze-bushes by the sea. Walter had kept his ground like a rock, ready for the worst. He watched the man's vanishing figure, and then turned slowly and confronted Dr. Ollivant.

"Do you join the profession of spy to your more orthodox avocations, Dr. Ollivant?" he asked, after a movement of surprise.

"I am glad to say that I heard every syllable your companion spoke to you after you passed that hedge," replied the doctor.

"I congratulate you upon having acquired so much enlightenment about my affairs."

"I have learned just this much about you—enough to justify me in using my strongest endeavours to prevent your marriage with Flora Chamney."

"What, you mean to interfere, do you! Not content with putting your grip upon the young lady's fortune, you want to get the young lady herself. Do you think I haven't seen your drift from the first? And you would like to avail yourself of a disreputable ruffian's random charge in order to set Mr. Chamney against me? A clever game, Dr. Ollivant."

"I repeat what that man said to you, blackguard and profligate," cried the doctor, livid with anger. He knew not that in his rage there was any more personal feeling than righteous indignation against a hardened and heinous sinner. "From the first I have known you to be unworthy of Miss Chamney. I have known you to be fickle and unstable—blowing hot and cold; but so long as I knew no more against you than this, I held my tongue. Do you think I shall be silent now—now that I know you varied your courtship of Miss Chamney by the seduction of a humbler victim? No liar, no seducer shall marry Mark Chamney's daughter, while I have breath to denounce him."

Walter had heard Mr. Gurner's abuse with supreme indifference; but Dr. Ollivant's reproaches stung him keenly. This last insult seemed the culmination of a series of wrongs. The doctor had been his secret foe from the first: had underrated his talents, denied his genius, been his silent and stealthy competitor for Flora's love. That word "liar" was just too much for mortal patience. Walter raised the light cane he carried, and brought it down within an inch of Dr. Ollivant's face. Then all Cuthbert Ollivant's secret jealousy and hatred—the smothered fire that had consumed his breast so long—blazed out. The doctor seized his assailant with the grip of a tiger.

"I repeat what I have said," he cried. "Liar, seducer, charlatan! You shall never be Flora's husband!"

The words came hoarsely from those breathless lips—came in the midst of a scuffle. The doctor wrestled, the painter made free use of his fists. For some moments Walter had the best of it, till, feeling himself losing ground, the doctor called science to his aid, and planted a blow on his antagonist's temple, which sent Walter reeling backwards, helpless and unconscious. Reel-

ing backwards on the sunburnt slippery sward that edged the cliff—backwards until, with a wild cry of horror, the doctor saw him sink below the verge. Cuthbert Ollivant stood on the cliff alone, staring into space, convulsed by the horror of that moment. Could his outstretched arm have saved a life? Had he, the man of iron nerve, failed in this one dread crisis in the common attribute of presence of mind?

He stepped close to the edge and looked down. The red rough earth was loosened and broken, and a good deal of it had fallen with the falling man. There he lay at the foot of the cliff, half buried in that loose red clay, barely a distinguishable object from the height whence Dr. Ollivant beheld him.

“Dead, of course,” thought the doctor with a pang.

He hurried down the incline of the cliff; it took him a long way from that prostrate figure, yet was his only road to the beach—his only way of getting to the place where Walter lay. Halfway down the descent he met the stranger running to meet him.

“How did it happen?” he asked.

“Is he dead?” cried the doctor.

“Dead as Nebuchadnezzar. How did he fall? Did you pitch him over?” demanded Jarred in the most friendly manner, as if to throw a young man over a cliff was one of those errors to which the best of natures are liable.

“We had a scuffle; he attacked me, not I him. I held my ground as long as I could without striking him. Then finding he was savage enough to do me serious harm, I gave him a blow on the temple, that stunned him. He reeled backwards; the grass is slippery——”

“Yes,” interrupted Jarred coolly; “that’s the wisest way of putting it.”

“What do you mean, fellow? I have told you nothing but the truth.”

“It would ill become me to say you haven’t,” replied Jarred apologetically; “but coroners and jurymen have more speculative minds than mine; they will go into probabilities, and they might take it into their heads to disbelieve that account of yours. They might call this little business manslaughter; or, if they happened to be a pigheaded lot of country shopkeepers, murder.”

“They can call it what they choose. I can only tell them the same story I have told you. Let me pass, if you please; I want to see if there is anything to be done for that young man.”

“Yes, there’s a coffin to be made for him, and an inquest to be held upon his remains. That’s about all, I believe; unless you mean to give him the luxury of a tombstone.”

“How do you know that he is dead?” asked the doctor irre-

olutely. Curious and intricate questions were beginning to revolve themselves in his mind. It would not be a nice thing to stand accused of this young man's death—to find his truthful statement of facts scouted as the veriest fable. But worse than trial by jury, or the pains and penalties of the law, would be Flora's loathing—Flora, who would believe him the assassin of her lover—the desolator of her glad young life.

"How do I know that he is dead!" echoed Jarred scornfully. "By all the signs and tokens of death—glazing eyes, a heart that has stopped beating, livid lips. Do you suppose he had any chance of life—as much as one in a million—when he fell over that cliff? Come, now, sir, you take my advice—I'm a man of the world—a man who has been knocked about by the world, and who knows how blessed ready the world is to drop down upon a man, if once he puts himself in the wrong—take my advice, and keep this business as quiet as you can. It's uncommonly lonely about here, and I don't think there's much chance of people passing along the beach before the tide is in; it'll be close up to the cliff in a quarter of an hour, I should think, by the look of it. Once the tide is in, you're safe. The body may be brought in by another tide, or picked up at sea; but there'll be nothing to connect you with the body."

"There's nothing to connect me with it now," said the doctor thoughtfully—he was evidently impressed by Jarred's suggestion—"except humanity."

"But there'll be plenty of evidence against you, if you go down yonder and potter about, trying to bring the dead back to life."

"Why are *you* so concerned for my safety?" asked Dr. Ollivant. "Yon, who are a stranger to me."

"Out of common humanity; or, if you don't think that motive strong enough for a man of the world, I'll go a step farther, and confess that I should be glad to do a service for a gentleman who may be able to serve me in return. I'm a friendless vagabond, and wouldn't stick at a trifle to do a friendly turn to a man who could be grateful for a kindness."

"Suppose I refuse your intervention, not seeing my need of your help?"

"In that case, I shall tell my own story about that young man's death; and it may not happen to be quite so favourable to the idea of your innocence as your own account of the business."

"You mean that you would swear to a lie to get me hung!"

"By no means. I should only describe what I saw and heard from the beach just now. How I heard voices—yours raised in anger; heard you declare that Mr. Leyburne should not marry

Miss Chamney while you had power to prevent him. I'll swear to that speech through thick and thin. Then came hurried footsteps on the cliff above me, like the steps of struggling men, one of them fighting for his life; and then I saw Walter Leyburne hurled over the edge of the cliff. He fell, almost at my feet, stone dead. All the cross-questioning of all the Old-Bailey lawyers at the bar wouldn't make me alter a syllable of that statement."

A damaging statement for Dr. Ollivant assuredly, and difficult of disproof. There was so large an element of truth in it.

"Come," said Jarred, reassuming his friendly air, as if he had known the doctor twenty years, and had always been attached to him, "you'd better treat the business like a man of the world. It was an unlucky slip, and you're very sorry for it; but there's no use in crying over spilt milk. Ten minutes more, and the tide will be up; and before an hour is over, that poor young fellow will be carried out to sea quietly and comfortably. You go home to your friends, Dr. Ollivant, the quicker the better, so that you may be in a position to prove an alibi if Mr. Leyburne should have been seen about the cliffs by any one."

"How came you to know my name?" asked the doctor suspiciously.

"I've heard it many a time. I was a friend of young Leyburne's till he led my daughter wrong, and I know all about you and the young lady in Fitzroy-square. I've been living in Branscomb village for the last two days, waiting for a quiet opportunity to speak to my young gentleman; and I've seen you all together. Come, there's no time to lose. I must run back to the beach and watch. You're going home, aren't you?"

"Yes, I suppose that's the best thing I can do, since there's nothing to be done for—him," pointing towards the beach. "You can call on me in Wimpole-street some day, and claim payment for your silence."

Jarred ran back to the beach as fast as his feet could carry him. The doctor glanced seaward with a thoughtful eye. The tide was rolling in, but not so fast as Jarred had asserted; it would be an hour yet before that spot where the prostrate figure lay among the crumbled earth would be covered by deep water.

The doctor looked at his watch—not yet four o'clock. Great heaven, how brief the time since he had lain down to rest under the hedge, and how the whole aspect of his life was changed by that one hour!

There was no such person in the world as Walter Leyburne.

That question which he had so often asked himself—which he had asked of Flora—whether he might not have won her save for this rival—must now be answered by the future. Death had cleared the ground for him. It was for him to make good use of his opportunity.

He walked homeward, heavily burdened with care, yet with a guilty joy in the thought that the marriage he had dreaded could never take place—that he should never be called upon to bless Water Leyburne's wife.

He loved too strongly to be merciful or even just. In his heart of hearts he was glad of that fatal chance which had ended the painter's brief day of betrothal.

"It was his own fault," he thought. "I was not to be felled like an ox by the mere brute force of a detected scoundrel. He knew he was guilty, and that made my reproaches hit all the harder. Thank God I overheard that conversation, and discovered the fellow's worthlessness before it was too late to save Flora! Thank God even for his awful death, if that alone could save her from alliance with a profligate."

It seemed to Cuthbert Ollivant that the direct action of Providence was visible in all that had happened. Hardly anything less than Walter Leyburne's death would have cured Flora's infatuation. The strongest evidence that could have been brought before her would have failed to convince her of his unworthiness. To her he would ever remain the splendid abstraction of a girl's first love-dream—as incapable of any wrong deed as that cold perfection, a statue, is incapable of descending from its pedestal.

But he was gone! She might give him her tears, her regrets—enshrine him in the temple of her memory—but she could not give him herself. There was boundless comfort in that thought. New hope sprung up—a Titan; not that feeble hope of the past. Dr. Ollivant forgot how much longer a woman grieves for the love she has lost untimely than for the love she has won and worn out, like a threadbare garment—till the vanishing of the silken woof reveals the coarser thread of the warp.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Look not thus pleadingly on me! The tears
Thou sheddest in thy bitterest grief are joy
Beside my tearlessness."

It was half-past five when Dr. Ollivant came in sight of the sugarloaf roof of the Norman tower. The summer afternoon was softly melting into summer evening—a brighter gold upon the waves, a deeper purple in the distance—a warm rosy light over beach and village; the forerunner of sunset's glory and glow. All Nature's voices seemed to have a mellower sound just at this hour; and Dr. Ollivant, to whose observation evening in Wimpole-street rarely offered any more interesting features than the six-o'clock postman, or the brougham of a rival practitioner over the way, was moved by the soft influence of the scene.

"At such an hour as this one would think that Nature meant all men to be good," he mused; "but, then, Nature belies herself as often as mankind. Yonder restful sea will have her fit of wickedness—savage winds will come tearing over those peaceful hills; Nature will indulge her bad passions just like the weakest of us."

The doctor looked back along the summer waves. Somewhere under that blue water Walter Leyburne was swaying gently to and fro, entangled among sea-weeds perhaps, and with cold anemones cleaving to his hair, lullabied as gently by that soft murmur of ocean as ever his mother rocked him in her arms. To-night or to-morrow might come wind and storm, and the same waters would tear and buffet him, and shatter him against the rocks in their frantic sport; but for this evening, he could scarcely have a pleasanter resting-place than that cool blue sea.

"Better than to be stretched in a narrow coffin, and shut up in a room that all living things avoid," thought the doctor.

Death had been so familiar to him that his rival's swift passage from life to eternity impressed him less than it might have impressed another man. The universal doom was always before his mind, under more or less painful aspects. That a man should have fallen from a cliff was hardly worse than that

he should be cut off by fever or consumption. Yet little more than an hour ago he had been weak and plastic as a child in the hands of Jarred Gurner. The cold drops of a deadly fear had stood upon his brow at the thought that, if Jarred gave his version of the scene on the cliff, Flora would believe him a murderer. What would she not believe in her distraction, if the knowledge of her lover's untimely fate came to her in its dreadful certainty?

A figure was standing at the garden-gate—the slender form he knew so well, in its flowing muslin dress, with gay blue ribbons fluttering here and there—not a toilet that carefully followed the last turn in Fashion's ever-revolving wheel, but a simple girlish dress, careless, unsophisticated, with only a school-girl's aspiration for the beautiful as embodied in a blue sash and breast-knot.

As he drew nearer, he saw the fair young face watching him with an anxious look.

"How late you are, Dr. Ollivant!"

"Am I? I hope your father has not wanted me—has not grown worse?"

"No; thank God, he is better. What have you done with Walter?"

The question electrified him. How like a murderer he felt just at this moment—how like the first murderer when the same awful question was addressed to him! And yet by no deliberate design had he compassed his rival's death.

An unlucky blow—given in self-defence—that was all.

"What have I done with him?" he echoed, forcing a smile. "We have not been together. I expected to find him with you."

Once on the fatal road, lies came glibly enough. He had an appointed part to act, and must play it boldly.

"Did you?" said Flora, with a disappointed look. "I have not seen him since breakfast. He said he was only going out for an hour or two, while I read the paper to papa. It isn't very kind of him to stay away so long. I waited luncheon till past three, and couldn't eat anything then. And how faint he must be—so many hours after breakfast! Artists are so absent-minded. But you are looking pale and tired, Dr. Ollivant; come into the drawing-room and have some sherry-and-soda," added Flora, remembering the duties of hospitality.

"I am tired; I've been a longer round than usual among those hills on the road to Tadmor in the Wilderness," said the doctor, remembering Jarred's suggestion about an alibi.

"And alone all the time?" exclaimed Flora wonderingly. She could not understand the delight of such solitary rambles.

"Alone—with my own thoughts—and the image I chose for my companion."

They went into the drawing-room; a shadowy retreat, with close-drawn venetians, save to one window which looked away from the sun, across darkening purple waves, to the distant rocks of Fairbay. Flora had contrived to beautify the barely-furnished room with flowers and bookstands and gay little work-baskets, and prettinesses of an essentially girlish character. The canaries were there in their big cage, chirping placidly now and then, as if they meant to think seriously about singing before the summer was over. The doctor cherished a secret conviction that they were all hens, and that Flora, who had chosen them for the brilliancy of their colour, and the showiness of their paces, had been deceived as to their vocal capacities. To-day the doctor had no eye for the canaries or the prettinesses of that cool retreat, where Mark Chamney reposed luxuriantly on his sofa by the one unshrouded window. He had eyes only for Flora's face, wondering how it would look as time went by and brought no tidings of her lover—how it would look if they had to tell her he was drowned.

Mr. Chamney spoke to him, and he answered reasonably enough; yet, if questioned the moment after, would have been sorely puzzled to tell what he had been talking about. Never had Flora been kinder to him than this afternoon. She made him sit in the easy-chair opposite her father's sofa, poured the wine into his tumbler, even opened the soda-water bottle herself, with dexterous fingers.

"I learnt to do it for papa in Fitzroy-square," she explained, proud of her proficiency. "When I was at Miss Mayduke's I should have thought opening a soda-water bottle as awful as firing a cannon."

She seemed cheered by the doctor's return, as if it presaged Walter's speedy coming.

"I daresay he has walked as far as you," she said.

"He" meaning Walter, of course," cried Mark, laughing. "What curious people lovers are! That poor child has been going in and out of this window every five minutes, fluttering like a frightened bird, standing at the garden-gate to look up and down the road, and then coming back to me with the saddest little face—'No, papa, not a sign of him.' What an exacting wife you'll make, Baby, and what a stay-at-home husband you'll expect!"

"I don't suppose husbands stay at home always, papa," replied Flora, pouting. "I'm not quite so ignorant as you think. But I thought when people were engaged, they generally spent a good deal of their time together, just to see if it answered."

"If the engagement answered?"

"Yes, if they really, really liked each other. For, you see, a gentleman may make a lady an offer on the impulse of the moment—Walter is very impulsive, you know, papa—and he may find out afterwards that he doesn't care about her as much as he thought he did. His engagement gives him plenty of time for that; for if he and his betrothed are a good deal together for long, long hours, he must know for certain if he is quite happy in her company, and never, never dull or tired of her; and if she can really be all the world to him—as a wife ought to be."

"A very good definition of the uses of courtship, Flora. When Walter goes for his next long walk, you shall go with him, and see how your pretty little feet can adapt themselves to his pace—walking the journey of life by his side."

Dr. Ollivant looked at the purpling sea, and thought where this Walter really was of whom those two spoke so gaily.

"What time do we dine, Baby?" asked Mr. Chamney, after an interval in which Flora had been out into the garden for another look along the road.

"The usual time, papa—seven."

"You'd better go and get rid of the dust of your walk, Cuthbert. It's past six—and your toilet is always such a scrupulous business."

The doctor started from a reverie.

"Yes," he said, when Mr. Chamney had repeated his observation, "I'll go. I'm up to my eyes in dust. That red earth on the cliffs——"

"Why, you said you had been on the hills——"

"I mean on the hills. The soil is all the same colour—red, like blood."

He went up to his room. The sight of his own face in the glass startled him.

"I look like a murderer," he said to himself. "The mark is there already. Come, if I don't keep a better watch over myself, they'll find out the truth from my face."

Copious ablutions in cold spring-water helped to obliterate the mark. Carefully brushed, well-made evening clothes assisted in erasing the brand. No murderer could have wished to look better than Dr. Ollivant looked as he entered the drawing-room, where Flora was watching so wearily for the faithful knight who came not.

Pale always, thoughtful always, the burden on his mind made no change in his aspect. To his own eye there might be a guilty look, but the guilt was within, and the sinner's

imagination invented its outward tokens. The eye sees what the mind invents.

Perhaps the worst feature of his hideous secret was that it urged him to perpetual lies. Just now, seeing Flora's watchful look, he was constrained to say,—

"Not come yet? He's late, isn't he?"

"Very late. I asked them to keep back dinner for a quarter of an hour. I hope you don't mind. You must be very hungry."

"Must I? Why?"

"Because you have had no luncheon."

"Haven't I? No, to be sure. I forgot."

"What a bad appetite you must have to be able to forget your luncheon!"

"I don't know. Luncheon seems rather a lady's meal—like five-o'clock tea, and all those extra refreshments. I don't know that men would not thrive better if they were fed like dogs, and wild beasts in Zoological Gardens, once a day. Nature would adapt herself to the system."

"How dreadful! As if life could possibly go on without meals. It isn't that I care so much about eating, but it is so nice to sit at a table with people one likes, and talk in the leisurely way people talk at meals. Surely meals are the bond of society."

"I suppose so; but you see I don't care for society. It seems rather a hardship to me sometimes to be obliged to sit at table with my mother for an hour and a half, while our old servant dawdles in and out with vegetable-dishes, and brushes away crumbs, and polishes glasses, and changes spoons and forks, and lays out figs and oranges and dry biscuits that we never eat, when I should get as much sustenance from a mutton-chop swallowed in ten minutes."

"I'm afraid you're a misanthrope, Cuthbert," said Mark from his sofa. "You'd rather sit in that dreary consulting-room of yours, with some musty old book before you, than enjoy the best society earth can give."

"I beg your pardon; there is some society for which I would surrender all my books—light the fires of the Turkish baths with them—obliterate from my mind all the knowledge they ever gave me—begin life afresh, ignorant as a child."

"Why, Cuthbert, you talk as if you were in love!" cried Mark, laughing. "Come, little girl, I think we've given this young man grace enough. You had better ring for dinner. I daresay Walter has come across people he knows, and is dining somewhere."

"But he doesn't know any one in Devonshire."

"How can you be sure of that? He may have met some roving acquaintance—some brother of the brush."

"I won't keep you waiting any longer, papa; nor you, Dr. Ollivant. But it does seem so strange, so rude and unkind, to stay away without sending any message. And he has never kept us waiting before. O papa, if something should have happened!"

"Why, Baby, what could happen amiss to a strong young man with all his senses about him? You mustn't look so miserable at a few hours' separation, little one, or I shall wish I had never picked up this young scapegrace."

"It isn't that, papa. If I could only feel sure that he is safe."

"I wish I were as sure the forequarter of lamb won't be spoilt by this foolish delay. Come, Ollivant, give Flora your arm."

They sat down to dinner, but a cloud was upon them. Flora's absent looks, her listening expectant air, disturbed both her companions. Mark could not be happy while his daughter was anxious. This first cloud—light as it might be—filled him with uneasiness. What if his fancied wisdom had been foolishness after all? What if Cuthbert were right, and this young painter really inconstant and unstable? He slighted his betrothed by this unexplained absence. He had no right to cause her alarm by some frivolous change of plan.

They lingered at the dinner-table; Flora doing her utmost to protract the ceremony, in the hope that Walter would be with them before they had finished; and then giving particular instructions for fish and joint being kept hot, in case of Mr. Leyburne's return. It was past nine when they went back to the drawing-room, where one lamp burned with a pensive light remote from the open window.

Here they sat in almost absolute silence; Flora on a footstool at her father's feet, looking up at the starlit sky, and waiting for the first token of Walter's return; Mark lying back in his arm-chair, with one hand resting tenderly on his daughter's silky hair; the doctor seated on the other side of the window, looking out with his straight steadfast gaze. Even the consciousness of guilt could not make those calm eyes shift.

With every rise and fall of the waves he thought of the cold form they carried in their lap to-night. *It* rose and fell with that gaily-lifting water—*it* moved with every ripple—he could almost fancy he heard the dragging sound of the heavy body over its ocean-bed—the grating of the pebbles—as the sea drew it along, bound by the long slimy weeds; the cold dank weeds which by this time must clothe it like a garment.

And all this time Flora watched and listened as if he could come back to her.

Midnight came while they were still sitting in patient silence, but they sat on even later, until it seemed unreasonable to expect Mr. Leyburne's return.

"He must have had some unforeseen summons back to London," said Mark, who had beguiled the slow hours with occasional slumbers.

"Who could send for him, papa? He has not a relation in the world, or at least not one he cares for."

"Pshaw! all young men have bosom-friends. Some brother artist in distress may have appealed to him, and he has hurried off to his friend's assistance. You know how impulsive he is. Your geniuses are not to be judged by common rules. I dare say we shall have a letter or a telegram to-morrow."

"God grant we may!" said Flora piteously; "but I am afraid something has happened—some misfortune. I don't think he would leave us so unkindly. Dr. Ollivant," turning to him with earnest appeal, "what do you think? Is there any need for fear?"

She looked at him entreatingly, as if she would have besought the strong man for comfort. The poor little face looked white and wan in the sickly flare of the candle she was holding, as she paused on the threshold for some word of hope. That look of hers rent Cuthbert Ollivant's heart. Not even the sweet hope of winning her by-and-by could counterbalance the agony of that one pang—to see her thus and know the suffering that awaited her. The slow days of hope deferred—the dull anguish of uncertainty—or, if the sea gave up her dead, the horrible truth.

He could not answer her with a lie.

"Alas, dear Flora, life is made up of fears and sad surprises. I—I am inclined to think there must be something wrong."

Mark Chamney turned upon him indignantly.

"It's too bad of you to talk like that, Ollivant, when my little girl is as nervous as she can be, and has been making herself positively wretched about this scapegrace, who is enjoying himself somewhere or other, I daresay."

Dr. Ollivant shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"It is always wise to be prepared for the worst," he said. "I didn't say there was anything amiss. I only said there might be."

"Yes, you're like one of those confounded Greek oracles we used to read about at school, who were never wrong, because they were never clear. You sha'n't frighten my Flora with your dark speeches."

"Let her take comfort from the thought that she has you by her side," said the doctor gently; "that's the best comfort I can give her."

"And that is comfort!" exclaimed Flora. "O papa, papa can I complain so long as I have you?"

She threw herself into her father's arms, and shed the first tears of her new grief upon his breast.

"If he has deserted me," she said in a low broken voice, "I can bear it."

"Deserted you, my pretty one! Do you think you are the kind of sweetheart a young man would run away from?" cried the father soothingly.

Dr. Ollivant stood in the shadow and witnessed her grief. It was hard to bear, remembering that one fatal blow into which he had put all the force of his manhood.

CHAPTER XIX.

"If he lived,
She knew not that he lived; if he were dead,
She knew not he was dead."

THE next day—and the next—and a week of slow and weary days went by, and brought no news of the missing man. There was no letter—there was no telegram. The inquiries which Mr. Chamney set on foot round and about threw no light on the mystery. Every one about Branscomb remembered the young painter; almost every one had seen him; many had spoken to him on that last day; but since a little after noon on that day no eye in Branscomb had beheld him. He had been seen to shut up his paint-box and portfolio, to give them in charge to a boy for safe conveyance to the villa, and then to go up the hill yonder towards the cliffs, smoking his cigar.

Only one of Mr. Chamney's informants had anything to add

to this simple statement. 'This was an idle young fisherman, who rarely seemed to do anything more actively laborious than watching other people work. This youth affirmed that soon after the painter went up the hill—it might have been ten minutes, it might have been pretty nigh a quarter of an hour—he had seen a strange-looking party in a velveteen jacket and a billycock hat come out of the Blue Lion public and mount the hill, in the same direction, as it might be following Mr. Leyburne. He had took particular notice of this party, being a stranger. That was all.

The emergence of this velveteen-jacketed stranger from the Blue Lion, and even his ascent of the hill, were hardly circumstances forcible enough to point to any direct conclusion. Walter was young and strong—not the kind of man to fall a prey to any prowling vagabond—a man whom prowling vagabonds would be likely to avoid. He carried little money about him, and, except a good chronometer, offered small temptation to the footpad. Mr. Chamney therefore paid little attention to the young fisherman's remarks about the peculiar-looking character in velveteen and felt hat.

Dr. Ollivaut, touched with pity for Flora's distress, postponed his departure, at the hazard of his professional interests, and was the moving spirit of the investigation. He did not waste time upon discussion, but went over to Long Sutton, and set telegraph at work. He telegraphed to the landlady in Fitzroy-square—answer paid. He telegraphed to Walter Leyburne's shipping friends in the City, and waited at the station till both messages had been answered.

The reply was the same in each case; neither the landlady nor the shipbroker had heard or seen anything of Mr. Leyburne since the 30th of June—the date of that scene on the cliff.

What other answer could Dr. Ollivant have expected? He folded the messages, and went back to Branscomb to show them to Mr. Chamney and his daughter.

Flora turned from him with a sigh.

"How could you expect to hear of him in London?" she said. "He has either met with his death in some dreadful way down here, or he has run away from me."

The last possibility was almost as bitter as the first, and it was a possibility that occurred to poor Flora very often.

Had he really loved her, or had he been influenced by her father's too obvious desire for their union? That doubt humiliated her. Fear of his untimely death, shame at the thought that he had perhaps deserted her, that his disappearance was only a trick to rid himself of an unloved betrothed, divided her mind; and the double burden was too heavy for her to bear.

Before the week was ended she was lying in her airy white-curtained bedchamber, languid and ill.

"What is to be done?" asked Mark Chamney in an agony of fear.

"We must get her back to London. The journey won't do her any harm—she is not ill enough for that. But if she stays here, and listens to the moaning of that sea—here, where everything will remind her of her missing lover—I won't answer for her health of mind or body. Again, if he should be drowned, and the sea give him up to us—! Such a shock as that might be fatal."

"Do you think he is drowned?" asked Mark despondently.

"It seems the most likely. Something must have happened to him. What more likely than that he was going to find some lonely nook to bathe in, that time he was seen going up the path towards the cliffs? There's that gully about a quarter of a mile from here, where there's a tempting bit of sand. He may have gone down there for a swim. You know how fond he was of the water."

"Yes, but he was a splendid swimmer."

"You've only his own word for that," responded the doctor. "All men fancy themselves great swimmers. It's one of the common weaknesses of humanity. Besides, splendid swimmers do sometimes come to a bad end."

"True," sighed Mark. "Poor Walter; I can't bear to think that he is really gone. Strange mockery of Fate! I thought I had made my child's future safe and happy when I gave her that young man for her protector. Yet he goes before me. I knew that I was doomed. How could I think that the doom was upon him too?"

Dr. Ollivant had been watchful of the sea during this last week. He had supplied himself with all the local papers, and studied all paragraphs relating to the drowned. The waves gave up no less than three victims on the western coast during this period, and Dr. Ollivant travelled many miles to inspect these mournful remains. But none of those three drowned men bore the faintest resemblance to Walter Leyburne; and the dismal inspection over, the doctor went back to Branscomb somewhat relieved in mind.

Perhaps the sea meant to keep his secret altogether. Again and again had he pondered his conduct on that fatal day—his seeming weakness in accepting Jarred Gurner's silence—a silence which would have to be paid for by-and-by. He knew well enough that in permitting this man to befriend him—to stand between him and the law—he had sunk below the level of his former life. Straightforwardness, manliness would have

urged him to stand the brunt of what he had done; to tell his own story, and hazard all consequences.

But against this there was the fact that the truth, tell it how he might, meant ruin. He must confess that angry scuffle—confess that deadly blow. Where would his professional status be after such a revelation? What would be his chance with Flora? To speak the truth was to lose all; and the truth could not help the dead.

Thus, after prolonged deliberation, he told himself that if there had been ever so much time for consideration, he could hardly have decided otherwise. That strange vagabond had summed-up the exigencies of his case wisely enough. To potter over the dead man, to be found beside him, would have been ruin. His present position was mean, despicable. Granted; but he had been obliged to choose between that degradation and the loss of all he valued.

The week stretched to ten days, and Mr. Chamney was no wiser as to Walter's fate. Flora grew worse; increasing languor, increasing disinclination to live. She had no fever. Delirium did not drift her fancies out of the real world into a region of distorted shadows. She only turned her face to the wall, refused meat and drink, hardly answered even when her father spoke to her—seemed to be slipping gently out of life.

Dr. Ollivant counselled removal from Branscomb; she had just enough strength for the journey; but in a little while it would be too late.

"You mustn't take her back to Fitzroy-square," he said; "everything would remind her of Mr. Leyburne. You ought to take some nice rooms out at Kensington, where the world would look fresh and bright to her. A delicate flower like that will only flourish under certain conditions of atmosphere."

"I'll do anything you like," answered Mark helplessly; "only don't let me lose her. I didn't think loss could come near me, who have so short a time to live; yet now it seems as if my brief span may be long enough to outlast all I love."

"Don't be downhearted, Mark; you shall see our pretty flower bloom again. Shall I telegraph to my mother, and tell her to get you some nice rooms near Kensington Gardens before two o'clock to-morrow? She'll do anything I ask her."

"Do, Ollivant. We'll travel to-morrow if you think it wise."

"I look upon it as our only hope of rousing her. She won't leave off grieving, of course, for some time to come; but one great incentive to grief, the scenes which recall her lost lover, will be removed."

The doctor rode over to Long Sutton, and despatched his

telegram; so carefully worded, so full of precautions to secure his patient's comfort and well-being. The rooms were to be cheerful and airy, with a southern aspect, if possible; within five minutes' walk of Kensington Gardens; brightly furnished; not the usual dismal lodging-house pattern. Mrs. Ollivant would have hard work to find such model apartments.

When the intended journey was announced to Flora, there came a difficulty. The girl rose up in her bed with newly-awakened vitality, and turned angrily upon the doctor.

"What," she exclaimed, "leave Branscomb before we know what has become of Walter! I did not think you were so cruel, Dr. Ollivant."

"Do you think I have been wanting in my efforts to find him, Flora?" asked the doctor.

"I don't know; it is too soon to give up; it would be heartless to go away and leave him to perish, lost perhaps on some dreary moor or in some wood. The people here will take no trouble when we are gone."

"Let me say a few words to her alone," said the doctor, appealing to Mark, who stood at the foot of the bed watching his daughter with a countenance of despair.

He obeyed his old schoolfellow without a word, and slipped quietly from the room, but only to the landing outside, where he waited the issue of events.

"Shall I tell you the truth, Flora?" asked Dr. Ollivant, when they were alone.

"Of course; what do I want but the truth?" she answered impatiently, those eyes that were wont to be all softness bright with anger.

"Then, believe me, all has been done that can be done. If we were to stay here a year, and spend all your father's fortune upon the search, we could do no good. Every reasonable inquiry has been made, in every direction. Either Mr. Leyburne has gone away of his own accord, or the sea has swallowed him up. The latter seems to me the more likely event."

"Why did I ever wish him to come here!" said Flora. "It was my fault for being so anxious to have him here. And he came to his death!"

"Flora," said the doctor, taking the burning little hand, "was Mr. Leyburne the only person you ever loved?"

"How can you ask me such a question, when there is papa, whom I love with all my heart?"

"Do you? And yet you behave as if the world had only held Walter Leyburne—as if your father's anxiety, your father's grief, were indifferent to you. You lie upon this bed, and turn your face to the wall, and give yourself up to despair, because

one man has gone out of the world, forgetting that you are breaking your father's heart—that you are killing him."

"Dr. Ollivant, how can you say so!" cried Flora, startled.

"I only tell you the truth. You know that your father is ill; that with him life is held by a feeble thread; but you do not know how ill he is, or how attenuated that thread of life. The whole bitter truth has hitherto been mercifully kept from you. But now it is time you should know the worst. For your father's complaint, grief or anxiety of any kind is full of danger."

"What is my father's complaint? Tell me the worst."

"Chronic heart-disease."

Flora cast herself, sobbing, on the pillows. Her lost lover was forgotten; the shadow of that deeper, greater loss darkened her narrow world. A dull dead feeling of despair came upon her. Was she doomed to lose all—she for whom a fortnight ago life had seemed all brightness?

"Is there no cure?" she asked at last, raising herself again from the pillows, and turning to the doctor with streaming eyes.

"You who are so clever, you can surely cure him."

"The age of miracles is past, Flora, and nothing less than a miracle could cure your father. He knows that as well as I know it. What I can do by care and treatment to prolong his life I will do, you may be very sure of that; but the course you have taken during the last ten days is calculated to undo all the good I can do—nay, more than that, is likely to have a fatal effect."

"O, how wicked I have been, not to think more of my father—the first and dearest in the world—my father, whom I love better than life!"

"Your grief has agonized him. Your refusal to eat—your silence—your obstinate determination not to be comforted, even by him—think how these must have tortured him. Every pang you make that weak heart suffer brings him one step nearer to the end."

"O, I have been out of my senses," cried Flora; "how else could I have been forgetful of my father! I thank you, Dr. Ollivant, even for telling me the worst," she went on, choked with tears. "It has been a hard blow; but better than ignorance—better than false security. My dear, dear father! He shall never more be pained by any selfish grief of mine, so long as God spares him to me. I will make his repose, his happiness, the single study of my life. O Dr. Ollivant, be careful of him—prolong his life."

"Be sure I will do my uttermost, Flora. Shall I call your father in again?"

"Yes."

She dried her tears hurriedly. Mark saw no trace of her grief as he came beside her bed and bent down to kiss her.

"Dr. Ollivant has been scolding me, papa," she said, with something of her old bright way, "and I mean to behave better in future. I will go back to London to-morrow, if you like."

"Ollivant thinks it will be better for you, darling."

"I will do whatever is best for you—whatever you wish, papa. And now, if you'll send Jane to me, I think I'll get up, and come down-stairs and sit with you while you dine."

"Will you really, my pet?" cried Mark, delighted; "that will make me quite happy again."

Mr. Chamney and the doctor withdrew, and presently Flora rose from the bed where she had cast herself in her despair, with a wicked hope that she might never rise from it again. She let the housemaid dress her, and smooth out the tangled brown hair, and put on the blue ribbons which she had worn for Walter's gratification. He had made a little water-colour sketch of her in those very ribbons. And now she was going back to a world in which there was no Walter Leyburne. She would hear of painters and of pictures, and of all life's brightest things, and know that he had no more part in them; he who had been so ambitious, and had hoped to conquer kingdoms in that wide world, the future. The sun came streaming in upon her from the open window; there lay the blue bright sea—the sea which perhaps was his grave—the very fairness of this world, upon which she had turned her back for the last blank miserable week, made it hateful to her. Such a smiling deceptive world, full of sorrow and death.

The maid let in all the sunshine.

"It's a lovely afternoon, miss," she said; "and it'll do you a world of good to go down-stairs and walk in the garden a bit with your par or Dr. Hollinfount, so anxious as they've both been about you too."

Flora went down to the drawing-room, looking almost as white as her dress, and contrived to answer her father's anxious look with a smile. There was heroic effort in that smile, though Flora was a small unheroic person. Mark proposed a stroll in the garden before dinner, and Flora went with him, and looked at the carnations and the geraniums and verbenas and silvery-leaved plants with which the nurseryman had embellished the garden, at Mr. Chamney's expense; and at the youthful myrtle on the wall which was to climb to the roof in years to come. She passed the green bank on which she had sat when Walter proposed to her, and gave a pathetic look at the spot, remembering how happy she had been *then*, and how full the world was

of hope. She sat by her father while he ate his dinner, with better appetite than he had had since Walter's disappearance, and she even made a faint effort to take something herself—a blade or two of asparagus—a morsel of chicken—a few of the strawberries which Dr. Ollivant's care had supplied. She tried to smile—tried to speak of indifferent things; and there was something in that forced cheerfulness which sharpened the doctor's agony of remorse. It was not Walter alone he had slain by that burst of passion on the cliff—he had killed hope and joy in this gentle heart.

CHAPTER XX.

“ Thus I wander'd, companion'd of grief and forlorn,
Till I wish'd for that land where my being was born.”

IN a long dormitory, where two rows of pretty little white-draped iron bedsteads were ranged at mathematical distances, Louisa Gurner awoke to the educational world—awoke from feverishly vivid dreams, in which she had been walking with Walter Leyburne in the chestnut groves of Hampton Court; dreams of so improper a character that, had they been published, they would have been sufficient in their enormity to warrant the strange damsel's expulsion from Thurlow House.

The stranger, hopelessly wide awake at half-past four in the morning, looked down that long vista of beds, and reflected that among all those sleepers she could not number a friend. Fifteen pairs of eyes would open by-and-by at the discordant clamour of the gong, and all would greet Miss Gurner with the same cold wondering stare, as a new girl who had nothing to recommend her to their friendly notice, and much in her disfavour.

Loo gazed along those rows of sleepers, and shuddered. Had she awakened in Millbank prison she could hardly have felt more completely miserable. Nay, at Millbank she would have

been better off, for she might have had a cell to herself, or at best only one companion, and at Millbank no one could have looked down upon her.

Here she felt herself the object of universal contempt. She was a year older than the eldest pupil; and while that happy eldest pupil was crowning the triumphs of a prolonged scholastic career by private lessons in Latin, chemistry, and Italian singing, exalted even above that senior class in which she had long distinguished herself, poor Loo had been placed in the nethermost rank of little ones, where she sat at the lowest end of a stumpy form, feeling herself a huge grotesque figure, among small children who openly laughed at her ignorance.

Gazing at the cold cleanliness, the rigid order of that spacious dormitory, Loo's thoughts reverted to the back-parlour in Voysey-street, and that scene of homely muddle upon which her eyes had been wont to open. The battered ancient furniture crowded in that narrow space, the table still scattered with the utensils of last night's supper, the saucepans in the fender, Jarred's pipes and tobacco-jar on the mantelpiece, the dingy old pictures on the walls, the stained and worn old crimson-cloth curtain that kept out the north wind, the big arm-chair in which she was wont to sit after supper—now filled with a kind of effigy of Mrs. Gurner, composed of that lady's empty garments, which from long use had assumed the shape of the wearer—the sleeping grandmother's wrinkled face and frilled nightcap of doubtful purity: Loo thought of these things with a regretful sigh.

She had hated Voysey-street with all her heart; but this bleak unfriendly outer world seemed harder than Voysey-street. There, at least, she had been like the rest of the inhabitants; here she felt herself a Pariah. She would rather have had to get up and clean that dingy back-parlour, blacklead the grate, lay and light the fire, fill the kettle, run out for rolls and Yarmouth bloaters, squabble with the milkman, go through all the familiar daily round of sordid household toil, than rise presently to meet the blank gaze of those unfamiliar faces, to sit at the breakfast-table fed and provided for, but unnoticed and unloved.

Miss Tompion's young ladies looked at her with the eye of suspicion; she knew and felt that it was so. They had asked her certain regulation questions as to her belongings and past career; to which she had replied with resolute reserve. Was she an orphan and a ward in Chancery? No. Had she a father and mother? No; only a father. What was his profession? An artist. What kind of artist? A picture-restorer.

The girls looked at one another doubtfully, and Miss Port-

slade, the young lady who was finishing her education in Latin and chemistry, and who had taken the inquiry upon herself, elevated her eyebrows, as much as to say this was very low indeed.

"A picture-restorer!" she repeated. "Isn't that the same as a picture-cleaner?"

"I believe so."

"Then I'd say 'cleaner' in future if I were you, Miss Gurner. It doesn't sound consistent for a young lady in the lower fourth to use fine words. And, pray, where does your papa, the picture-cleaner, reside?" looking at the others as much as to say, "Observe the humour of the situation."

"In Voysey-street," answered Loo sulkily.

"Is that anywhere near Eccleston-square?" asked Miss Marchfield, the belle of the school, who lived in that locality.

"I don't know."

"O, come, you must know if Voysey-street is in Belgravia."

"I don't know Belgravia."

"What, not after living all your life in London?"

"I hardly know anything of London except the street I lived in," returned Loo, flaming out upon them with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks. "I have come to school because I am ignorant—that's why I sit on the form with the little ones, that's why I am here. My father is not a gentleman, and Voysey-street is not a street that ladies and gentlemen live in. The Voysey-street people are common and ignorant and poor. I have come here to learn to be a lady, if I can—though if I'm only to be taught by example, I don't think there's much chance for me."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Portslade, colouring, while some of the other girls tittered slightly, not sorry to see "Portslade" get the worst of it. "We are learning to be satirical—I suppose that's the first effect of education!"

Loo went back to her exercise-book, and laboured earnestly at the rudiments of the French tongue; and the young ladies, opining that they had obtained the utmost information to be extracted from her, asked her no further questions. There seemed nothing interesting in her circumstances. Had they known that she was an exile from her father's roof, and that a handsome young man was to pay for her education, they would not have let her off so lightly. These romantic circumstances might even have elevated her above their contempt; but Loo kept religious silence upon the subject.

Miss Tompion had been requested to purchase an outfit for her pupil, and had received no limit as to expense. But being a person who prided herself upon her conscientiousness and

uprightness—virtues which she brought to the front on all occasions, and pushed to the border of severity—Miss Tompion was careful to purchase such garments as were suitable to Louisa's somewhat indefinite position, and to her future humble career as a bread-winner. Gowns of plainest material and Quaker-like hue did Miss Tompion procure for her pupil—no silks, no trimmings, none of the small unnecessary graces of the toilet. When Loo came down dressed for church in her claret-coloured silk on the first Sunday, Miss Tompion narrowly escaped a fainting-fit.

"Never again let me behold you in that dreadful dress, Miss Gurner," exclaimed the instructor of youth, when she had recovered the normal tranquillity of her spirits; "a dress eminently inappropriate to your position, and most repugnant to my taste. Believe me, that your first appearance in this house in that dress would have been sufficient to secure your exclusion, had the references afforded me been less satisfactory than they were. Fold it neatly and place it in the bottom of your trunk, if you please, Miss Gurner, and come back to me in that nice gray alpaca which I selected for you."

Loo went up to the wardrobe room—a bleak repository of boxes and best raiment—and put away the obnoxious gown, but not until she had showered the rich red silk with scalding tears of shame and anger—not until she had kissed the garment with her hot dry lips.

"He gave it to me," she gasped, "and I love it for his sake—and I hate the ugly nasty things she buys me. Just as if I was some poor creature who had gone wrong, and was here to be reformed. I feel myself marked out from all the rest even by my clothes—as if that were needed to make a difference, when they are so unlike me in all things belonging to them. Their fathers and mothers, and uncles and aunts, and cousins and friends—people coming to see them—people sending them parcels—people writing them letters; while I stand alone—and have no one—not even poor old grandmother. It would do me good to hear her nagging—after Miss Tompion."

The beginning of education seemed the weariest work to Louisa Gurner. She had only little bits to learn—little bits of geography and arithmetic, English grammar and French grammar—and a bald twaddling English history to read with her small companions. The spoon meat suitable to babes of eight or nine years was deemed suitable to her because she too was a beginner. In all the educational process there was nothing she could grasp at. Bald facts about the Heptarchy and William the Conqueror—an infantile history of Rome from the babyhood and youthful squabbles of Romulus and Remus

to the age of the Cæsars—what was there in these to charm Loo, who had read English and classic history in Shakespeare's living page—who had breathed Egypt's warm airs with Antony and Cleopatra, and followed mighty Queen Margaret from the day of her youthful pride to the hour of ruin, bereavement, and exile? Wearied out by the inanity of her daily labours—labours which she executed with honest earnest care, for his sake who had placed her in this seminary—Loo ventured to ask Miss Tompion for some books to read in the evening.

"With pleasure, my dear Miss Gurner," replied the school-mistress graciously, "if you have conscientiously completed your studies and prepared yourself for to-morrow."

"I've learned all my lessons, and finished my exercises, and I think I could do a good deal more, if you please, Miss Tompion, if I were allowed. I feel so out of place among those little girls—so big and awkward on that low form—and they laugh at me. I'm sure I could learn three times as much—I don't feel as if I was getting on a bit."

"I am sorry to observe the indications of a discontented spirit, Miss Gurner," said Miss Tompion with severity. "It was my wish that you should be placed in the lower fourth, that you should ascend by easy gradations, and not overtax your capacity at the outset. Remember that in almost all things you are as ignorant as those small children at whose childish mirth you complain. It is my desire that you should be thoroughly grounded, Miss Gurner—that you should begin at the beginning—and not acquire a mere surface varnish of education, which would wear off as quickly as it was attained."

Loo blushed at that allusion to varnish, thinking of her father's pictures.

"If you feel yourself out of place on the form, you may have a cane chair at the end of the bench," said Miss Tompion. "I am willing to make that concession to your feelings."

"Thank you, ma'am. I shall feel less ridiculous in a chair."

"And now what kind of book would you like?" asked Miss Tompion, glancing at some well-filled shelves of neatly-bound volumes immediately behind her chair, volumes which the pupils were permitted to borrow.

"Poetry, if you please, ma'am. Might I have a volume of Shakespeare?"

"Shakespeare!" exclaimed Miss Tompion, horrified. "Do you suppose that is a book I would place in the hands of any pupil in this establishment? Shakespeare! You horrify me, Miss Gurner. I believe there is an expurgated edition, intended for the domestic circle, published by the estimable firm of Chambers; but until they can expurgate the subjects of many

of the plays, no edition of Shakespeare shall enter any domestic circle where I keep watch and ward. I will select a book for you, Miss Gurner."

Whereupon Miss Tompion handed the abashed Loo a dryasdust volume of missionary travels in the South Sea Islands, with repellant portraits of copper-coloured converts, and prosy descriptions of the bread-fruit tree. Poor Loo yawned drearily over the South Sea Islanders, and could not interest herself in the question of their ultimate conversion. She remembered how many heathens there were around and about Voysey-street—heathens who heard church-bells pealing Sunday after Sunday, and yet stayed at home to smoke and drink and idle, and perhaps wind up the day with a wife-beating. Loo remembered the general condition of Voysey-street, and wondered that people should go so far afield for converts.

Every day made the school routine more irksome to her. The gates of knowledge were opened such a little way; she felt she had learned a great deal more from Walter Leyburne's books, in those stolen night-watches while her grandmother was asleep, than she could ever learn from Miss Storks, the instructress of the little ones, whose homœopathic doses of information only wearied her. A few dry dates; a little bit of general information about the castor-oil tree, and the process which converts hops into beer, or barley into malt. Hard uninteresting facts were administered to her like powders. If Miss Storks had given her Schiller and a German dictionary, the eager desire to know a new poet might have overcome all difficulties; nay, difficulties would have inspired this vigorous nature. But the easy twaddle of the lower fourth disgusted her with the whole business of education. Her ardent longing for enlightenment would have given a zest to toil. She would have laboured early and late, had she felt herself gaining ground, climbing upward to that mountain land tenanted by the spirits of the wise and great; but instead of studies that would call upon her industry and develop the latent power of her mind, Miss Storks gave her infantine lessons, which she repeated parrotwise, in common with girls in pinafores and plaited hair.

"I should have to be here ten years before I knew as much as Miss Portslade," she thought despairingly; "and she seems a mass of ignorance, compared with Walter Leyburne."

She, the Pariah, had ventured to question that exalted Brahmin, the most exalted girl in the school. She had talked to Miss Portslade of poets and painters, and had been surprised by the narrow views of the damsel, whose acquaintance with the world of imagination had never gone beyond the choice morsels in a gift book or selection for recitation, and who knew

about as much of art as the great gray cockatoo on the brazen stand in the ballroom—a big bare apartment opening on the garden, where Miss Tompion's pupils took their dancing lessons.

It was a hard thing to sit in that peopled class-room, and feel herself friendless—to see the girls with arms round one another's waists in confidential talk—to know that all had their favourite companions, their friendships, their secrets, their various bonds of union, and to know herself outside all. After that cross-examination by Miss Portslade, her fate was sealed—the fiat had gone forth—she was a vulgar common person, whom it was not the correct thing to know. Her very presence in the school was an offence against those high-bred young ladies. Miss Portslade's father was a half-pay colonel at Bath; whereby she looked down upon the Miss Collinsons and the Miss Pycrofts, whose parents were coachbuilders and Italian warehouse people; and only tolerated Miss Badgeman, whose father brewed. Miss Portslade had remarked that the line must be drawn somewhere. At no superior school in Bath would an Italian warehouseman's daughter be admitted. Miss Portslade had shut her eyes to the degradation of Italian warehouses; but now a picture-cleaner's daughter was foisted upon them, Miss Portslade felt that the line must be drawn; and the line being drawn, severed Louisa Gurner from the young persons among whom she lived. The barest civility was shown her; she was as lonely as a leper in an Eastern city; nay, more alone, for she had not even fellow-lepers with whom to keep company. Some soft-hearted damsels among Miss Tompion's pupils looked at the Pariah with eyes of pity, as she sat isolated at the darkest end of the schoolroom conning her brief lessons. These yearned to show her some kindness—to speak a few cheering words—yearned, but dared not: the fear of Miss Portslade was before their eyes. There is nothing more slavish than a schoolgirl; and Miss Portslade's sarcasm was considered crushing.

It had been decided at an early stage of Louisa's initiation that she was not only vulgar, but ugly. Those large dark eyes were not proper—too large, too dark, too brilliant when she was angry. The long black lashes were tolerable enough, or would have been passable in a better-born young person. The dark-pale complexion was simply abominable.

"I wonder if she ever washes," mused Miss Portslade.

"I should think she must be a Jewess, with those eyes," remarked Miss Badgeman.

"Or perhaps her mother was a gipsy, and sold brooms," speculated Miss Collinson.

"A good idea, Collinson. It's like you to put a spoke in her

wheel," retorted Miss Portslade, with a happy allusion to the coach-building business, whereat Miss Collinson blushed.

The general opinion about her ugliness found its way somehow or other to Loo's ears. The little ones—either egged-on by some malicious elder or spontaneously spiteful—communicated the effect of that *Vehngericht* in which Miss Portslade was chief magistrate. They told Loo what had been said of her complexion and of her eyes.

"Did your mother really sell brooms?" asked Miss Flopsion, the lowest in the lower fourth.

"No, she didn't," answered Loo; "but I'd ever so much rather sell brooms than stay here. You can tell your fine young ladies that."

The speech was duly reported in Miss Flopsion's shrill treble.

"Of course," said Miss Portslade, pausing in an Italian theme, in which she was descanting on the merits of Petrarch and Tasso in her fine Italian hand, "anybody could see that she has those low instincts. She is out of place here, and I'm glad she feels it."

Louisa wondered whether that was a true bill which charged her with ugliness. It was not the first time she had been reproached for lack of beauty. Her father, when in a good humour had praised her for her good looks—told her she had as fine a pair of eyes as you could meet in a day's walk, and that there'd be money bid for her yet, if she took care of herself. But when out of sorts—when the feathers of this bird of prey had been unpleasantly ruffled—Mr. Gurner had been wont to upbraid his only child—to call her black as Erebus, and ugly as a toad. Her grandmother had been wont to wail and lament because Loo favoured the Gurners rather than the old lady's own people, who were all fair, with aquiline noses and auburn hair, and appeared to have been a race alike distinguished for dignity and good looks. What of Walter? Had he thought her handsome?

He had hardly told her so! and though he had made her the model for two of his pictures, it was possible that beauty was not the characteristic of either heroine she had been required to represent. Lamia, the serpent-woman, must be at best a semi-diabolical personage. Esmeralda, the gipsy-girl, crouching on the prison-floor, could have been but a wild unkempt creature. He had seldom praised her beauty in all their free and happy talk. But he had done something better during that night journey from Kingston. He had told her that he loved her; with passion, with insistence had repeated the confession of his love; told her how he loved her in spite of himself; loved her all the while he had been striving his hardest to love some one

else; and that he would marry her and none other, if she would have him.

She had been brave enough to reject him; to say no; not once, but many times; not in the Kingston road only, but afterwards on the day he had brought her to Thurlow House. She had held his future happiness, his prospects, above her own content, and had said him nay, very proud that he had loved her well enough to contemplate such a sacrifice.

Thus, remembering that he had loved her, that decision of the schoolgirls about her ugliness troubled her very little. It was enough to know that she was good enough to be loved by him, fair enough to please the painter's eye, sweet enough to have crept unawares into his heart. Let the rest of the world condemn her as ugly and vulgar. She had won the only praise she cared for.

How she thought of him and dreamed of him in her new loneliness amidst an unfriendly crowd! There were certain intervals in which she was free to walk in the garden—the old secluded garden, with its high red-brick walls, and ancient turf, soft and deep, and century-old espaliers. The house was to be pulled down shortly to make room for a railway station; but in the meantime it was a fine old mansion—a relic of an old world. The schoolgirls could hear the hum of Kensington High-street from that shady old garden, but they could see no more of the outer world than the roofs and chimneys that rose above the wall.

Loo walked alone, and thought of the old pleasant easy-going days in Voysey-street—Voysey-street which she had hated so intensely while she inhabited it, but which she looked back upon now with a tender fondness. How happy she had been there, after all! What Bohemian ease and freedom of life! No sneers, no cold looks; nothing to endure but a little harmless nagging from Mrs. Gurner, monotonous as the dropping of water, and no more injurious; or an occasional outbreak of temper from Jarred. That had been bad, certainly; but he was her father and she had pitied him and loved him, and blamed the hardness of Fate and the world for all his shortcomings. She had believed what he told her so often—that he would have been a better man if Fortune had used him better.

Here there were no angry looks, no lightning glances that made her quail; no gradual change to good humour and friendliness, generally culminating in a hot supper and a jovial evening; for Jarred was at his best when he shook himself out of an evil temper, and comforted himself with a gill of rum from the public-house, and cried *Vogue la galère!* Here there were only cold indifferent faces, eyes which seemed to overlook her.

The garden was the best place, for there she could get away from the superior young ladies who had agreed to ignore her. There she could find a shady path, where she could walk up and down, and think of the days that were no more. Hard for the very young when they have to look back and say, "Yes; *that* was life."

Loo had been at Thurlow House nearly a month, and Walter Leyburne had made no sign of his remembrance of her. At parting, when she clung to him, weeping passionately, forgetful of all good resolutions—very woman in her sorrow and weakness—he had comforted her with promises of letters and visits. Miss Tompion had allowed them a few minutes—not more than five—of farewell, undisturbed by her presence.

"I'll come to see you, Loo, as soon as I think you've settled down a little, and I'll write every week."

"No, you won't; you'll go and marry Miss Chamney, and forget that there's such a person as I on the face of the earth."

"Forget you, Loo! I wish I could. Haven't you told me to forget you?"

"Yes—and it would be best for both of us. But don't do it all at once. I had rather you didn't come to see me; only write—do write, Walter!" speaking his Christian name in that low thrilling tone which comes from the depth of a woman's heart—rare had been her utterance of that dear name. "You will write, won't you, and tell me what you are painting, and if you are happy—and—when you are going to be married?"

"I wish you wouldn't harp upon that string, Loo. You've refused to marry me—so you may as well leave the subject alone."

"I want you to be happy," she said sorrowfully, tenderly, looking into his face with her solemn eyes, as if she were trying to read the mystery of his thoughts. "Hark! Miss What's-her-name is coming. You *will* write?"

"Yes, Loo; once a week at the least."

Once a week, and no letter had come in four long weeks. Poor unstable Walter had tried to write from Branscomb and had failed. It was too hard a task to write to Loo, when to tell her of his daily life was to speak of Flora. He felt that there would be a kind of treachery towards both in writing that promised letter—so he made up his mind to wait till he got back to London, when he would go and see poor Loo, and find out how she got on in her new place of existence.

"It wouldn't do to visit her often, of course," he said to himself; "but just once, to see if she is happy; nobody could object to that."

Then came that summer afternoon in the garden with

"Epipsychidion," and Flora's gentle joy when he offered her that weak heart of his. After that he could not think of Loo without a pang—and yet did think of her to his own torture—recalling her tears, her agonized look at parting.

"Poor child, she did not know it was for ever," he thought. "Yet she would not have me when I offered myself to her. I have no reason to be sorry for her. Perhaps it is for myself I am sorry."

At parting, Walter squeezed a crumpled envelope into Louisa's hand, just at the last moment of all, while Miss Tompion's eye was upon them. The girl forgot all about this paper in the pain of parting. She went straight up to the long white bleak bed-chamber which had been shown her—to the spotless little bed she was to sleep on, indicated by a neat cardboard tablet on the wall above, on which her name was written. Beside this narrow couch Loo flung herself, and buried her tearful face in the coverlet, and wept as long as her tears would flow—wept till the loud clang of the tea-bell pealed shrilly through the house, when the forlorn damsel rose, washed her face, and smoothed her tangled hair, but could not obliterate the traces of those foolish tears. Her eyelids were puffy and red; her cheeks white as a sheet of letter-paper. She looked a wretched creature to appear before fifty pairs of strange eyes.

Just as she was leaving the room, she spied that crumpled paper on the floor by her bed, and ran eagerly to pick it up. He had given it to her. It might contain some word of comfort.

Alas, no. Outside the envelope was written, "For pocket-money." Inside there was nothing but a twenty-pound bank-note.

She looked at the money as if it were the most despicable thing in the world—she who had never had a twenty-pound note in her hand before.

"How good of him!" she thought; "but I don't want his money. I'd rather have had a few lines of comfort."

CHAPTER XXI.

"Rich is the freight, O vessel, that thou bearest!
Beauty and virtue,
Fatherly cares and filial veneration,
Hearts which are proved and strengthen'd by affliction,
Manly resentment, fortitude, and action,
Womanly goodness;
All with which Nature halloweth her daughters,
Tenderness, truth, and purity and meekness,
Piety, patience, faith, and resignation,
Love and devotionment."

THE time came when Thurlow House grew almost unendurable to the lonely child of Bohemian Voysey-street. No star of hope shone across that barren desert of monotonous daily life. Those infinitesimal lessons of the lower fourth, that slow and gradual process which Miss Tompion called laying a foundation, could not employ an intellect keen enough to have grappled with the difficulties of serious study; to have climbed the rugged mountain of knowledge with light and rapid spring, from crag to crag, instead of creeping up Miss Storks's obscure pathway at a snail's pace, hampered and hindered by small dunces in pinafores.

The thought of how little she was learning was to the last degree irritating to Louisa Gurner. She could have borne the dreary exile in that unfriendly home, if her progress had been rapid, if she had felt that Walter's experiment would be crowned with success, and that he would have reason to be proud of her progress a year or two hence; proud of his protégée, even though he might be Flora Chamney's husband.

But to know that his money was wasted; that her education was progressing by inches; that there was nothing Miss Storks taught her which she could not have taught herself much more quickly! The night-school in Cave-square would have done more for her than Thurlow House was doing.

Nor was Walter's chief purpose being fulfilled. She was not learning to be a lady. Her only experience of the genus "lady" was derived from young persons who cut her, or talked at her, according to the humour of the moment; who were boastful and arrogant, loud-voiced and shrill of laughter; who called one another by their surnames without prefix, and whose various

claims to distinction were alike based upon the material advantages of their "people."

Louisa wondered if Flora Chamney, sweet and flower-like, in any wise resembled the noisy herd at Thurlow House. Perhaps individually, in the kinder atmosphere of home, the Thurlow House damsels might be gentle and gracious, refined and amiable. But in the aggregate they were essentially vulgar. Louisa contemplated them with wonder, and saw no chance of learning to be a lady in such companionship.

One day her patience suddenly deserted her. Miss Storks was out of temper, wearied by the stupidity and troublesomeness of the small children, and wreaked her wrath on poor Loo, who was bright and ready enough. Loo "answered"—an unpardonable offence against the laws of Thurlow House; Miss Storks replied with a sneer at Miss Gurner's antecedents; at which the small sycophants laughed their loudest by way of conciliating the irate Storks.

Loo bounced up from her seat, and flung her book upon the table.

"I will never learn another lesson here," she cried indignantly. "Mr. Leyburne does not pay his money that I may be insulted. He shall pay no more."

She ran out of the room, and up to the dormitory, caring very little what penalties she might have brought on herself by this open rebellion.

She had not been ten minutes in her retirement before she received a ceremonious note, written on highly-glazed paper, and delivered by the housemaid.

Miss Tompion presented her compliments to Miss Gurner, and having heard, with much pain, of her extraordinary exhibition of temper, requested that she would be good enough to remain in her own apartment until solitary reflection had taught her to govern her evil passions, and rendered her fit to associate with *young ladies*. The last words underlined.

"I don't want any more association with such young ladies as those," thought Loo angrily, as she tore up Miss Tompion's solemn missive, and threw the scraps of paper out of the window, to flutter lightly down to the lawn below on the summer air. "I don't want to have any more to do with them. What is the use of my staying here to be solitary and miserable, when I'm doing no good for myself, only wasting his money? I must get away somehow before he has to pay another term in advance."

She knelt down by the open window, looking up at the bright blue sky above those dingy old house-tops yonder, the rugged tiled roofs of old Kensington—time-blackened chimneys, not

unpicturesque gables; looking up and pondering her future. But she was not thinking how she could adapt her nature to the society of Miss Tompion's pupils; she was only thinking how she could get away from Thurlow House altogether.

Strange, perhaps, but this young Bohemian could not exist in an utterly loveless atmosphere. There had not been very much affection for her in Voysey-street; she had not tasted all the sweets of parental love; had not basked in a grandmother's fond smiles. But Jarred and Mrs. Gurner had cared for her a little. They had not been without their moments of tenderness. She had been "my girl" and "my lass" to Jarred when he was in a good temper. She had been "Loo dear" with Mrs. Gurner, when things went smoothly; and she had been "our Loo" even at the worst. She belonged to them, and in her heart of hearts she loved them dearly—yes, even the discontented grandmother.

Here, she belonged to no one. She was an intruder, a wanderer from a lower world, who had pushed her way into this exalted sphere, and was made to feel herself at once unwelcome and out of place.

"I won't stand it any longer," said Loo, looking up at the blue sky with its fleecy drifting clouds; "I'll run away. I can't go back to father, after his turning me out of doors. I'll emigrate—go to Australia. What's that place where Mr. Chamney earned all his money? Queensland. Mr. Leyburne has shares in some of the ships that go there. I've heard him talk about them. Ships that carry out hundreds of emigrants to a great fertile country where there is room enough and food enough for them all. I'll go to Queensland. Domestic servants are always wanted, thy say. And I know how to do housework. I've had plenty of it in my time. And I should get well paid there, and might save money in a good many years, and be a lady by-and-by. And I should have an hour or two at night, when my work was done, to read as I used in Voysey-street; time to educate myself better than Miss Storks would educate me in three miserable years."

This impulsive young person was quick to decide where her feelings were strong. She had money, that bank-note which Walter had given her—a secret hoard of which she had thought with thankfulness in her hours of despondency, a sum which would assist her flight at any time.

The tea-bell rang while she was meditating this awful step. Six o'clock. In two hours more it would be almost dark—the soft summer darkness. She knew all the habits of the house. Prayers were read at eight. The great hall-door was not fastened until half-past. While the whole school was at prayer

in the dining-room, she might go down with a small bundle of clothes, and slip quietly out into the forecourt. The tall iron gate would be locked, but the key was left in the lock until the chief housemaid went out at half-past eight to lock up for the night. Any one coming to Thurlow House after that hour was received with such drawing of bolts and turning of keys and clanking of chains, as made him keenly conscious of his untimeous visit.

Two hours, two slow silent hours, and she would be outside Thurlow House, and free. She thought of the white-sailed ship, the pathless sea, that ocean which her eyes had never beheld out of a picture. She thought of the homely common people who would be her companions. No contempt would she meet with from them. She knew how kind people were in Voysey-street, how friendly, how ready to help, how interested in one another's welfare. Fond of scandal, it must be owned, and not unwilling to throw the first stone; but ready to pick up the pelted victim, and take her into their houses, and bind up her wounds and comfort her, when the stoning was over.

Would her flight be an act of ingratitude towards Walter, the benefactor who had wished to educate and make her a lady? In seeming, perhaps, but not in reality. It was the best thing she could do for him, to remove herself out of his path for ever—an element of perplexity, a cause of trouble gone from his life. He had looked so sorry for her, so distressed, so embarrassed at that dismal parting, when her fortitude had altogether deserted her, and she had shed her foolish tears upon his breast.

Better, far better that she should be on the other side of the world, as far as distance could remove her from the painter and his young wife. Better for him, happier for her.

"Perhaps I may cure myself of loving him—in Australia," she said to herself.

Some tea was brought her—tea only in name. A pint mug of tepid cocoa, a plate of piled-up bread-and-butter—square blocks of stalisb bread faintly smeared with some fatty preparation—an abundant, but not an appetising meal. Miss Gurner did not even look at it.

Time wore on; the sky grew yellow above those ancient roofs, then red, then opal. The great bell rang for prayers, the harsh cruel bell whose clamour had so often recalled her from delusive dreams. She had prepared her bundle, a neat square package, tightly compressed, containing as much as she could venture to carry—linen, brush and comb, a second gown, a second pair of boots—a bundle which was not big enough to make her conspicuous in the streets.

She examined her purse, an old worn leather portemouaie. It contained the twenty-pound note, and one silver sixpence, the residue of those three shillings and sixpence which her father had given her for a pair of gloves.

The sixpence would pay for an omnibus to take her to the City. But once in the City, what would she do for a night's lodging? It might be too late for her to get on board an emigrant ship, and she knew enough of the world to know that her twenty pound note would be looked at with the eye of suspicion. It was just possible, however, that she might obtain a night's lodging on credit, and get her note changed in the morning.

Or if the worst befell her, she could walk about the quiet city streets till morning. She was not appalled even by this contingency. She would bear anything to escape from Thurlow House and its unfriendly occupants. Nothing occurred to hinder her flight. She went softly down-stairs, through the silent house, which would be so noisy half an hour hence when the girls were going up to their dormitories. She could hear the solemn droning of Miss Tompion's voice as she flitted lightly across the hall.

The great door could not be opened and shut without noise, a sound that seemed to reverberate through all the realms of space. Loo dashed across the courtyard, scared by that perilous clamour, opened the gate with convulsive haste, darted along the little bit of quiet bystreet which divided Thurlow House from the high-road.

Once in that busy thoroughfare she felt as if the worst were over. A red omnibus was passing; she hailed it with a shrill cry that made the driver bring his horses up sharp, she dashed into the muddy road, sprang lightly on the step. "All right!" cried the conductor; and Loo was sent into the vehicle almost head foremost, as the horses pursued their journey with a sudden plunge.

"That's how I like to see a young woman get into a 'bus," remarked the conductor admiringly to an outside passenger; "none of your shilly-shally: not like your middle-aged parties, who keep us waiting five minutes while they're tucking up their petticoats, and shutting up their blessed umbrella." "

"Does this omnibus go to the City?" faltered Loo, when she had regained her breath after that frantic flight from the privileges of polite education.

"Yes, miss. Mention House—Benk."

What should she do when she got to the Mansion House? Ask her way to the nearest Australian ship? or try to find the office of Messrs. Maravilla and Co., the great shipbrokers, who exported emigrants as plentifully as Provence exports sardines,

and packed them almost as closely, yet with extreme consideration for their comfort?

The hour was too late for either course. She must either find a shelter, or walk the stony-hearted streets, till morning and business hours revisited this part of the globe.

The omnibus deposited her at the Mansion House after a journey that seemed long; a journey through lighted streets that had a bright and cheerful look, pleasant to the eye that had not of late beheld a lamp-lit city. At the Mansion House, Loo asked her way to the Docks, but was unable to state what docks she wanted, and therefore received vague instructions to keep straight on through Cornhill, and then ask again.

To Loo, Cornhill was as other hills; and not seeing any sharp incline, she turned off to the right, and strayed over London-bridge into the Borough. Here she wandered for an hour or so, till weariness began to creep on her. Even that bundle of clothes grew heavy, after she had carried it a long time. She sat down on the steps of St. George's Church to rest, but was told to get up and move on by the guardian of the night.

Banished from this haven, she turned out of the broad busy Borough, still busy even at eleven o'clock, and entered a labyrinth of quieter streets, which led her by various turnings and windings into another broad and busy thoroughfare, the Old Kent-road. From the Old Kent-road she wandered to the New, where she looked hopelessly about for some house in which she could venture to ask for a night's lodging without fear of entering some den of infamy. Those small dingy streets had a doubtful look. The dark obscure houses might be the abodes of vice and crime. Gaslights and a broad road seemed in some measure warrants of respectability. She paused before a coffee-house which was just closing for the night—a house that sold no spirituous liquors—dealt only in such mild beverages as tea, coffee, and cocoa, and might therefore be trusted. Here she was told she could have a bedroom; and emboldened by the landlady's face, which was honest and friendly, Loo showed her the bank-note as a voucher for her respectability.

"It's all the money I have about me," she said, "and I should like to get it changed if you could tell me where to find any one who would change it."

"If it's a good one I can get it changed fast enough," said the landlady. "You needn't be afraid to trust me with it. I've kept this house fifteen years, and my father before me. But how does a young woman like you come by a twenty-pound note, wandering about all alone at this time of night with that bundle?"

"I am going to emigrate," answered Loo. "I've saved the

money to pay my passage. I'm going to Queensland to service."

"Ah, and to get a husband, I suppose. That's what all the young women emigrants are after."

"No," returned Loo, with a sigh. "There's no one in Queensland that would tempt me to marry."

She entrusted the note to the woman, not without a fear that she might be made the victim of some London sharper. But the landlady's face was honest, and the place had a substantial air. A servant-maid brought her some supper—a slice of pale ham, a roll and pat of butter, and a large cup of steaming coffee. Rest and food were alike welcome. She had eaten nothing since one o'clock, and she had walked till she was dead-beaten. It was positive luxury to sit in the gas-lighted parlour, where the landlady's work-basket adorned the table, and the landlady's big tabby cat was purring its contentment on the hearthrug.

Loo ate her supper with a thankful spirit, grateful to Providence for this harbour of refuge in the big awful city, awful to her by reason of its strangeness and all the legends she had heard of its iniquity. She smiled at the thought of having escaped so easily from Miss Tompion. Perhaps they were driving about London in cabs, some of them, hunting for her. They would hardly find her in the New Kent-road, hardly follow all those doublings and windings by which she had found this humble shelter.

The landlady returned in about twenty minutes, and laid nineteen sovereigns and a pound's worth of silver before Miss Gurner.

"There," she exclaimed, "I've got it for you, but it wasn't very easy at this time of night, I can tell you."

Loo was duly grateful, and a quarter of an hour later was slumbering placidly in Mrs. Hampton's two pair back, wrapped in happier slumber than she had ever known amidst the frigid proprieties of Thurlow House.

She had begged to be called early, and rose at six, awakened by the first stir of life in the house. She had breakfasted and paid her small account by seven, when she took a friendly leave of the landlady, who told her the nearest way to Thames-street, where she was to find the office of Mr. Maravilla, the shipbroker, whose vessels sailed between London and Brisbane, with their mighty cargoes of poor humanity.

She walked to the busy street by the great river, still carrying her bundle, found the office, and had to wait nearly an hour for its opening. Here she paid half her passage money—eight pounds out of sixteen—and received a ticket entitling her to all those various and numerous articles of outfit which are

provided by a paternal care for the childlike and confiding emigrant.

She saw John Maravilla himself, opening letters and telegrams with the rapidity of a steam engine, and giving orders to three or four clerks at their different desks, while busy underlings pushed to and fro in and out. A smart and orderly office; desks of shining mahogany; smaller and more sacred offices opening out of the main building, like the chapels of a continental cathedral; plate-glass resplendent on every side; plenty of light, plenty of space, or the most made of all available space, and a superabundance of energy—an all-pervading briskness and vitality that was like quicksilver.

Mr. Maravilla himself condescended to address the lonely applicant, struck by an appearance which had little in common with the mass of emigrants.

"Going out alone? Well, you can't do better. Domestic service? That's the thing out there; wages three times what you can get in England, mutton threepence a pound, climate splendid, husbands abundant. Assisted passage, eh? No, going to pay yourself. Foolish girl! Never mind. Do well in Queensland. Never want to come back, nobody ever does. Jones, make out this young lady's ticket. You're just in time for the *Promised Land*. Blackwall Railway'll take you down to the West India Docks. Ask for the *Promised Land*; no time to lose. She'll be towed down to Gravesend this afternoon. Show that paper, get your outfit. Good morning."

Loo had hardly time to breathe before she found herself out in the streets again with that mysterious ticket, her passport to the Antipodes, in her hand, fairly launched for Queensland. Though she stood in the London street, she felt that she no more belonged to it, had no more part in its busy life, that she was already an exile. Eager as she had been to emigrate, the thought sent a sudden pain to her heart. What is that mystic tie which binds man to his native soil? so that, be he never so careless, to leave it is to feel a human sorrow, as when we say farewell to a human friend.

There had been rain all through the night and early morning, and Thames-street was at its dirtiest; but the mud and slush of Thames-street were as nothing compared with the quagmires of the West India Docks, which Loo approached by-and-by from the station. Here was mud indeed, and a new world, the mighty world of ships; tall slim spars piercing the summer sky; colours flying gaily from the foremasts of gigantic vessels; drawbridges to cross; merchandise being carried to and fro; casks without number; forests of logwood; wildernesses of wool sacks.

Loo had to ask her way a good many times, showing her ticket by way of warrant for her presence in that unknown world, before she arrived at a long low shed, where the superintendent was giving out stores to the emigrants; beds, tin pannikins, cutlery, forks and spoons of brilliant Britannia metal, which would not have disgraced a middle-class dining-table, hardware, marine soap, clothing even to some favoured wanderers, who mortgaged future labour to obtain supplies in the present—blue-worsted jerseys and moleskin trousers for the men; substantial brown and gray stuffs for the women to fashion into gowns and petticoats.

In this repository the bustle of departure was at its height. A clerk was sitting at his desk, entering the names of emigrants, the numbers of berths; here in family groups of two, two and a half, three, three and a half, four, four and a half, five; the halves representing juvenile members of the tribe; there, in solitary singleness, the youthful agricultural labourer, the pale mechanic, the young woman going across the world to better herself.

The emigrants passed along a kind of gangway, like the rail which guards the queue at the door of a Parisian theatre, and after receiving the number of their berths went on to the counter, across which Mr. Swan, the outfitter, was distributing his stores—first a narrow straw mattress, in new ticking, clean and fresh from the manufacturer; next, an assortment of tin vessels, mug, plate, basin; then cutlery; and finally three or four pale bars of marine soap; to some, moleskins and jerseys; to others, none.

He was a bright, pleasant-looking gentleman, this Mr. Swan, with a frank, good-humoured face, which was more youthful than his years. He spent his life in dealing out stores to emigrants, or contracting for tin pannikins and mattresses, and without having ever emigrated himself, looked upon emigration as the most agreeable thing in the world; a destiny for which all were born, those who remained behind having merely cheated fate, and deprived Queensland of her citizens. Mr. Swan would have depopulated the British Isles, and sent their inhabitants southward in quest of fortune, duly provided with tin pannikins. He was an enthusiastic Shakespearian student, and had the verses of the master bard ever on his lips—could hardly distribute his tins without a happy quotation, in fact. This morning's work would go on for some hours as fast as ever work was done, the tin pannikins jingling and clattering, the straw mattresses rustling, the shed crowded with human life, emigrants struggling up to the counter, emigrants staggering away under the burden of mattresses for a family, and Mr.

Swan's Shakespearian quotations rising cheerily above all the clatter; and in the afternoon Mr. Swan would go down to Gravesend on board the *Promised Land*, and would be seen in every part of the ship, distributing pannikins up to the last moment.

"'Why, so: now have I done a good day's work,'" said Mr. Swan, as he checked off a number of vouchers, receipts for the goods he had distributed, which represented his claims for reimbursement by the Queensland Government. "'Here comes a man, let's stay till he be past.' Now, young man, clear out with those mattresses. 'Now, fair one, does your business follow us?'" to Louisa, who had by this time approached the counter. "Going out alone? Ah, tired of this used-up old country, I suppose. 'and thou art flying to a fresher clime.' Quite right. Queensland is the sphere for you. 'There's place and means for every man alive.' There you are, my dear—one plate, one mug, two spoons. Plenty more on board among the single men for'ard. The young women are aft, but I have seen some of 'em forward.

'But, for their virtue only is their show;
They live unwoo'd, and unrespected fade.'

There's your mattress, my dear; clumsy load for a delicate young woman like you.

'Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends,
And ne'er be weary;'"

pushing across the straw mattress. Loo grasped the slippery tick as best she might, still clutching her bundle, and struggled away from the counter. A young emigrant, Irish and good-natured, relieved her of her heaviest burden, and offered to carry it to the ship for her.

There lay the *Promised Land*—a giant vessel, black, with a gold moulding round her, and her name in golden letters on her bows. All was life and motion on board her: passengers struggling up the accommodation-ladder laden with their belongings, ship's officers hurrying to and fro, sailors bawling to each other, stores being shipped, government inspectors taking stock,—all the business of emigration in full swing, and the emigrants themselves looking in nowise miserable. Whatever pangs they might feel hereafter, when the last faint outline of their island home faded from their gaze, and the sense of exile came upon them, they seemed too busy just now for regrets or lamentations. The young children sent up their feeble wailings, bewildered by the strange and bustling scene; but fathers and mothers, lads and lasses, looked happy enough; indeed the novelty of the scene seemed to have put every one in good spirits,

and cheerful voices and mirthful laughter rang clear above the various sounds of preparation.

At one o'clock there was a strong muster round the galley or cook-house, and brawny labour-hardened hands held out the tin dishes just received from Mr. Swan to an intelligent and shiny-looking coloured man, who filled the bright new platters with roast beef and steaming potatoes. For many weeks this good-tempered-looking darkey would minister to the living freight of the *Promised Land*, and the same eager cries would be heard from the pushing crowd of "Now, then, doctor, my turn next." This distribution completed, family groups were soon seated at the clean deal tables, looking happy enough in their narrow quarters, and doing ample justice to their first meal on ship-board. Hats and bonnets were hung up on convenient pegs in the narrow berths, luggage for the voyage arranged, children began to trot to and fro in the dusky cabin with curious faces, wondering at this great strange floating home.

Loo was taken down to the young women's quarters, and handed over to the matron; a comfortable-looking person, who had spent ten years of her life in perambulating the ocean. She asked Miss Gurner a good many questions as to why she was leaving England, and so on, which the Thurlow House fugitive found it rather hard to answer. But she did contrive to answer them somehow; and the matron, who heard too many statements to pay minute attention to details, was satisfied. Loo found her allotted portion of space, and laid down her mattress. It seemed a very narrow space after the ample dormitory at Thurlow House, but Loo did not regret that loveless mansion. The girls here were vastly below Miss Portslade and the aristocracy of Bath in the social scale, but they were cleanly and comfortably clad, honest and good-natured-looking, light-hearted and friendly. Some of these young exiles gathered round Loo, and would fain have taken her up on deck to watch the new comers, and enjoy the variety of the scene; but this favour Miss Gurner declined.

"I'm very tired, so I'll stay down here till the ship starts for Gravesend," she said; fearful lest some one from Thurlow House should have tracked her to the Docks, and come on board to claim her.

"What! haven't you any friends coming to bid you good-bye?" asked one rosy-cheeked damsel pityingly.

"No, my friends live too far away."

"And so do mine," said an emigrant of eleven years old, who had travelled up from Newcastle alone, and was going out to Brisbane to join some prosperous relations. "Father and mother are poor people at Newcastle, and there's such a

many of us; and uncle and aunt have got on so well in Brisbane; so aunt's wrote to say if they could send me out to her, she'd keep me and bring me up. And I'm going out alone."

While the little girl was telling her story, a jolly-looking man, with a round ruddy face, bright twinkling eyes, and somewhat Falstaffian figure, came pushing his way through the groups of girls, with the sailor's easy-rolling gait, to see that all things were going smoothly in this part of his ship. This was Captain Benbow, the master of the *Promised Land*, a man who looked the very personification of good health and good temper. He was round as a cask, and seemed brimming over with kindliness and jollity, like a hogshead with sound old October. This was his tenth voyage to Queensland, and his name was now almost a household word among the numerous homesteads of the new colony; and in many a letter home friends were urged to come out in the *Promised Land*.

Captain Benbow heard the child's account of herself with a fatherly smile, patted the curly head, and bade the matron take good care of the youngster. "If she wants anything out of the ordinary way, let me know," said he, "and the little lass shall have it."

Loo sat down in a corner, and made friends with this youngest emigrant, while the bustle and clamour and heavy tread of hastening feet went on over-head. She was glad to have something weaker, more helpless than herself to cherish. This fresh, bright little North-country peasant-girl might be quite outside the pale of Thurlow House gentility, but Loo was not the less pleased with her.

By-and-by, about four o'clock in the afternoon, came heavier trampings, louder noises, a grating of cables. The ship was leaving the Docks.

"Do let's go on deck," cried the little girl; and Loo yielded as much to her own unspoken wish as to the child's expressed desire, when she ran up the ladder to see the last of the great city which had been her cradle.

The ship was just beginning to move, drawn by a little puffing tug, which looked a mere cockleshell beneath those giant bows. The side of the dock was crowded with spectators—men waving their hats, women waving their handkerchiefs—some weeping, more gazing upward to that peopled deck, with a friendly grin of encouragement. The mass seemed to surge to and fro as the ship glided away. A cheer rent the air, an answering cheer rang from the deck; and lo, the *Promised Land* shot out of the Docks on to the broad breast of the strong river; and Loo felt she was an exile.

"Will he be sorry when he misses me?" she asked herself.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Ay, so delicious is the unsating food,
That men who might have tower'd in the van
Of all the congregated world, to fan
And winnow from the coming step of Time
All chaff of custom, wipe away all slime
Left by men-slugs and human serpentry,
Have been content to let occasion die,
Whilst they did sleep in love's Elysium."

FLORA was established in a new home, the lodging which Mrs. Ollivant had chosen in obedience to her son's telegram.

She had not made by any means a bad selection; and even Flora, to whom all the outer world wore a mournful empty look, as if Nature had assumed one pervading tone of melancholy gray—even Flora confessed that these apartments in Kensington Gore were very nice, and that the view of the Park from the drawing-room windows was pretty. But in her heart of hearts Flora felt that she would have preferred Fitzroy-square. She would have found a mournful consolation in looking out of the window, and remembering how many times a day she had seen Walter pass—in conjuring his shadow out of empty air, and fancying she saw him go by. She liked to feed her grief; she petted it, and made much of it; took the skeleton out of its hiding-place every night when she was alone, and fondled it; and fell asleep tearful with the bony creature in her arms, and hugged it in her dreams.

Before her father she affected serenity, or even cheerfulness. She ministered to him, she talked to him, walked in Kensington Gardens with him; though the placid beauty of those groves and lawns and still smooth water was loathsome to her. She never forgot Dr. Ollivant's warning: if she wanted to preserve her father's life, to lengthen his days, she must not afflict him by the knowledge of her misery. She must lock the door of her heart's secret chamber, and pretend to forget.

Mr. Chamney had been to Fitzroy-square, and had made all possible inquiries about the missing painter. Walter's landlady had received no tidings of him. There were his goods and chattels, his easel, his unfinished pictures—pictures that were to have brought him fame—just as he had left them. His desk,

his books, his pipes, his foolish little extravagances—emblems of youth and folly—all undisturbed. Had he lived, he would surely have claimed these things, which seemed a part of himself.

Mr. Chamney went down to the City, and saw Mr. Maravilla. He too had received no tidings.

"Haven't seen him for three months," said the shipbroker; "lets his money accumulate. He's been getting ten per cent. out of the Sir Galahad—lucky fellow. Everything Ferguson touched always turned to gold, and I suppose it's the same with his nephew."

"I wish I could find out what has become of him," sighed Mark; and then told the story of Walter Leyburne's disappearance.

"Odd," said Mr. Maravilla, "but perhaps not so bad as you think. A young man's escapade, very likely. He may have had his reasons for keeping out of the way."

"I hope not," said Mark. "I'd rather think him dead than a deceiver and deserter. I believe he loved my little girl, and that nothing less than death could have parted them."

Mr. Maravilla shrugged his shoulders doubtfully.

"Young men do such queer things nowadays," he remarked. "I always thought young Leyburne was rather wild."

Mark Chamney went home sorrowful. There was no comfort here for him to take to his darling. Happily, she seemed to be overcoming her grief. She smiled at him with almost the old smile. She fed and cherished her birds. She sat with an open book before her sometimes, and appeared to read. It was only Dr. Ollivant's watchful eye which noted how rarely she turned the leaves, how vacant was the gaze she fixed upon the lines.

Dr. Ollivant spent all his evenings at Kensington. He altered his dinner-hour from half-past seven to half-past six. He cheated himself of rest and study. He robbed his mother of the society she loved best in the world, for the privilege of sitting in the quiet little drawing-room in Kensington Gore, watchful, earnest, thoughtful, bent on one business, the cure of this wounded heart. He who knew so much of cardiac disease held to the belief that this disease was not organic, that the innocent heart might once again beat with tranquil pulsation, once again find joy in domestic affection and simple girlish pleasures. To console Flora was the task he had set himself, and while consoling to win her for his own. Love so real must conquer all things, he thought. There should be no foolish outburst of passion, like that untimely avowal in the Devonian burial-ground. Calm as the motion of the starry spheres should be his progress. "Without haste, without rest."

His only hope of success was to interest the dormant mind, to teach the head to cure the wounds of the heart. He observed that Flora had fallen into habits of indolence, a pervading lassitude, an indifference to all things save her father's comfort and health—habits that were strange to that bright, active, young life.

She had never touched pencils or colour-box since her lover's disappearance, and Cuthbert Ollivant was too wise to counsel a return to the old artistic efforts. Gulnare, with her scarlet fez and scarlet lips, blue-black hair and almond-shaped eyes, lay buried at the bottom of Flora's deepest trunk, and with Gulnare many a poor sketch whose every line recalled the guiding hand which had helped her; the bright head, with its waving auburn hair, so often bent over her shoulder; the friendly voice that had directed and praised. No, Flora would never paint again.

There was a piano in the Kensington Gore drawing-room, a Broadwood sent in by the doctor. But that piano might as well have been a dumb waiter, or a stage piano, innocent of strings or hammers. Flora rarely touched the keys. How could she sing, when every song, every ballad would have recalled the old happy evenings, the life that was fled? Once in a way she would play some mournful melody, some tender pathetic air of Mozart's or Beethoven's. But the music affected her too deeply, moved her to tears.

The doctor saw that she must have some kind of employment, some occupation which would beguile her from this brooding sorrow. The only question was what form the distraction should take. Music and painting were alike impossible. If Doctor Ollivant had been a religious man he would have persuaded Flora to go to church twice a day, and spend her leisure in visiting the sick and poor. But religion did not form an important part in the doctor's life. He went to church once every Sunday, and thanked an overruling Providence in a general way for his success in life, and he had never gone deep enough into theological questions to become an infidel. He determined to develop this poor child's intellect, to teach her something. That literature which he knew best was for the most part classical. He tried to interest her in the Roman poets, to open the gates of a new world. He proposed to teach her Latin; a dull dry business enough perhaps at first, but something for her to achieve, difficulties for her to grapple with, work to do.

He brought a translation of Horace one evening, and read some of the Odes; but before beginning he gave Flora a vivid sketch of the Horatian period, the world in which the poet lived and moved; described those wondrous cities, villas, gardens,

fountains, chariot races, gladiatorial combats; brought before her all the glory and brightness of old Rome, and then read the purest and best of the Odes.

"He does not seem to have been happy," said Flora, noting the minor strain in the music.

"Perhaps not, according to a young person's notion of happiness. He knows the world too well not to know that kind of happiness to be purely mythical, fabulous as that picture of life before Pandora opened her casket. But if not happy, he was wise. He knew the limits of man's capacity for joy, and made the most of life."

"I like his poetry, but I don't like *him* very much. Was he young and handsome?" inquired Flora with languid curiosity.

"Not always," answered the doctor discreetly. He was too wise to inform her just yet that the bard was somewhat ill-favoured and of a stumpy figure.

"Shouldn't you like to read Horace in Latin? You can have no idea of his power until you know the language he wrote in. The best of translations is mere jingle compared with the music of the original."

"It doesn't *look* very interesting," said Flora, glancing at the doctor's Latin copy. There seemed to be a good many long words ending in *ibus* and *que*. "But I'll try to learn Latin if you like. It might please papa to see me going on with my education."

"It would indeed, darling," cried Mark, who understood his friend's motive.

"Then I'll bring a Latin grammar to-morrow evening, and we'll make a beginning."

The beginning was made, and with the doctor's help was a very good beginning. His logical brain simplified all details. Flora found that there was some interest even in Latin grammar. Strange as it may seem, she derived more comfort from the four conjugations than from all the hackneyed consolations that friends could have offered. The doctor did his utmost to make the road easy—did not bind her down to the dry details of grammar, or nauseate her appetite for knowledge by keeping her too long to the slave who shuts the gate, and the citizen who cultivates the garden. He gave her a Horatian ode almost at the beginning, and by that one lyric showed her the genius of the language, and awakened her interest in the study.

Even though he saw her pleased and interested, willing to labour at verbs and exercises in the day, and eager for her evening lesson on Horace, he took care not to fatigue her or exhaust her interest.

"We will only give Horace two evenings a week," he said.

"I must find some fresh means of amusing you on the other evenings."

He brought his books, and taught her a little astronomy; awakened the organ of wonder by exhibiting to her that wide unknown world of the spheres. Here again her interest was quickly aroused, for the doctor was no dryasdust teacher. He contrived to enlist her sympathies for the mighty host of discoverers, from Ptolemy downwards. He told her the history of those darker arts, which mystics and false prophets of old time had associated with the starry heavens. Knowledge so new beguiled her into temporary forgetfulness of that one absorbing sorrow. Mark wondered to see her eyes sparkle and her cheeks flush when the doctor expounded the strange and complex movements of those unknown worlds, and revealed to his wondering pupil the infinity of distance and time in that undiscovered sky.

He was careful not to overtax the young student's brain, yet stretched the cord to its fullest tension, knowing that while the mind worked the heart must rest, even if that rest were but the dull leaden sleep of a heart empty of all joy. Not too often did he occupy her thoughts by that most awe-inspiring of all sciences, the study of the stars. On some evenings he brought her rare flowers, and showed her the mysteries of floral anatomy. Once when he had brought her an orchid of peculiar loveliness, a pinkish waxen-petalled blossom, like a floral butterfly, she clasped her hands with something of the old childlike joyfulness, and exclaimed,—

"O, that is too lovely to die unremembered. I must paint it."

"Do," said the doctor, pleased; "you cannot imagine how I should value such a sketch."

Only for a moment had she forgotten.

"No. I shall never paint again," she said, with that quiet sadness which springs from deepest feeling.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"No tear relieved the burden of her heart;
Stunn'd with the heavy woe, she felt like one
Half-waken'd from a midnight dream of blood."

FLORA's acquaintance for the popular Latin poet had only just commenced, when she was surprised one morning by a visit from a person whom she had never seen before, and whose right to approach her was questionable.

It was a fine warm August morning, and Mark Chamney had gone to the City on business, loth to leave his daughter indoors in such balmy weather.

"You'll go for a walk in the Gardens, won't you, my pet, with Tiny? Tiny wants a run."

Tiny was a miniature terrier, whose feet and tail seemed to have been borrowed from his natural enemy the rat. A black-and-tan terrier, with a sleek loose skin, whereby he might be lifted off the ground without injury to his feelings; a skin a size and a half too large for him, a misfit which was supposed to be a sign of his high breeding, as also his damp small nose, and the sparseness of hair on his small round head. This animal Mr. Chamney had presented to his daughter as a companion and consoler; and—youth is frivolous—there were moments when Flora derived comfort from the blandishments of Tiny.

"Very well, papa darling; I'll take a little run with Tiny. Good-bye, dear. You won't walk too fast, or overheat yourself, or sit in a four-wheeled cab with both windows open, or go too many hours without a biscuit and a glass of sherry?"

"No, Baby; I'll be as careful as an old woman. And I hope to be home again between two and three."

Flora accompanied her father to the hall-door, nay, to the gate of the little forecourt, and kissed him in the face of the Kensington-road, to the admiration of some young gentlemen on the knifeboard of a passing omnibus. And then she went back to the empty drawing-room, and walked up and down once or twice listlessly, and looked out of all the three windows one after another, without taking the slightest notice of Tiny, and felt that life was desolate

Happily she had promised to write a Latin exercise for the doctor; so, after a little despondent idleness she took out her books, pen and ink, and began about the hostages, and the slaves, and the messengers, and the ships, and boys and girls, and citizens and old men, and was soon absorbed in the difficulties of her task.

She was still plodding patiently on with perpetual recourse to her vocabulary, when the house-maid brought her a card, a stiff little card of that small size which is generally masculine, but this card bore a feminine inscription:

Mrs. GURNER,
LADIES' WARDROBE,
11 Voysey-street, Fitzroy-square.

N.B. Liberal terms given for Ladies' cast-off wearing apparel.
Ladies waited on at their own residences.

"An elderly lady, miss, asked to see you."

Flora stared at the card with a bewildered air. Two words in it awakened her interest—Fitzroy-square. Any one coming from Fitzroy-square had a claim upon her attention. They might tell her something about Walter.

The faint, faint tinge of slowly-returning health left her cheeks at that agitating thought.

"I don't know this person," she said, "but I'll see her. You can show her up."

Mrs. Gurner appeared presently; not the every-day Mrs. Gurner of Voysey-street, but a revised and beautified edition of the same work, bound in plum-coloured satin.

Mrs. Gurner had availed herself of her stock-in-trade to prepare for this visit. She wore the immemorial satin; the wine-stains on the front breadth cruelly visible in the garish light of an August noontide. Her stately shoulders were draped with a French cashmere, ancient but once splendid, the curiously blended hues of its pine border subdued by time. Her bonnet was purple velvet, with a yellow-tailed bird of paradise—gorgeous if unseasonable. Her gloves were black lace, revealing the lean claw-like hands they pretended to cover. She carried that relic of dark ages, a black-velvet reticule, and an antique green parasol.

Thus attired, and feeling herself equal to the requirements of Kensington Gore, Mrs. Gurner saluted Flora with a stately bend and solemn dip, of the *minuet de la cour* period.

"I have taken the liberty to call, Miss Chamney," she began, "thinking that, to a young lady of your means and position, it might be a convenience to be able to dispose of your cast-off

clothing. Articles which you might be tired of, and might even consider shabby, would be valuable in my business, and I am prepared to give you liberal terms for them."

"You come from Fitzroy-square, I think," said Flora, looking at the card in her hand.

"From the immediate neighbourhood of Fitzroy-square," replied Mrs. Gurner, with an air of scrupulous exactitude. "Voysey-street, a locality which, like myself and family, has seen better days."

"Please sit down," said Flora kindly. "What made you call on me?"

Mrs. Gurner smoothed out the plum-coloured satin before seating herself, glancing complacently at its purple sheen, a dress which any one might feel proud of.

"I had heard of your par's taking the house in Fitzroy-square, Miss Chamney, and of his being a wealthy gentleman from the colonies; and it had occurred to me that it was only natural you and me should do a little business—advantageous to both—relieving you of superfluous articles in your wardrobe. Young ladies of your ample means take a pleasure in buying new dresses, and naturally get tired of them before they're worn out. But I put off calling week after week, on account of the pressure of business; and when I did call a few days ago, I was informed by your housekeeper that you was at Kensington for change of air. 'Well,' says I, 'having set my mind on doing business with Miss Chamney, I won't be first-rated.' So I walk down to Piccadilly—a long walk on a warm morning—and step into the Kensington 'bus; and I hope, miss, having come so far, you won't refuse to do business with me."

"I am sorry," faltered Flora, "but I couldn't possibly sell my clothes. I should think it horrible. When I have done with my things I give them away."

"To servants and people for whose station in life your clothes are not suitable. Have you ever reflected how many pretty little things—laces and ribbons and so on—you might buy with the money you could get for your cast-off dresses?"

"No," answered Flora with a sigh, remembering what idle frippery ribbons and laces had seemed to her since she lost Walter; "no, I shouldn't care for anything I bought in that way. Besides, I have no occasion to make any such bargains. Papa is always ready to give me more money than I want."

"Ah," said Mrs. Gurner with a dismal sigh, "that comes of being an only child, reared in the lap of luxury. It's very different for some of us."

That profound sigh and Mrs. Gurner's doleful look awakened Flora's ready compassion.

"I'm sorry you should be disappointed," she faltered. "If half a sovereign would compensate you for your wasted trouble I shall be very happy——"

She opened her purse—a toy of ivory and gold—one of her father's many gifts.

Mrs. Gurner shed tears.

"Half-sovereigns are not plentiful where I come from," she said, "and I'll not allow my pride to reject your kindness. But I didn't come here wholly on business; there was something that lay nearer my heart. I've wished to see you this ever so long."

"But why did you wish to see me?" asked Flora, puzzled.

Mrs. Gurner shook her head and sighed, transferred the half-sovereign to an old leather purse, sighed again, and shook her head again.

"It's foolish, perhaps," she said, in a slow musing way, contemplating Flora's gentle face with a fixed and meditative gaze, "but I had a daughter—my only daughter, or at least the only girl I ever reared—and she went out to the colonies and died there—young. I've always felt an interest in any one connected with the colonies on that account, and hearing that your par had been in Australia—you were born in Australia, I suppose?"

"Yes, but I was sent home when I was very little. I can't remember anything before I came to England."

"You can't remember your mar?"

"No," said Flora sadly.

"You've got a picture of her, perhaps?"

"No, there is only one in the world, and papa wears that in a locket."

Again Mrs. Gurner sighed, looked out of the window dreamily, as one who looks backward through the mist of years.

"My girl was very pretty," she said; "a girl who might have done well anywhere—steady and clever, and always the lady. She wasn't a Gurner. She was a little in your style; same coloured hair and eyes, and such sweet ways, the best of daughters. But something happened that she took very much to heart—it wasn't anything that happened to her, poor child, or by any fault of hers; and she said, 'Mother, I feel as if I couldn't breathe in England after that;' and she went out to Australia with a young female friend which was left an orphan, and had a brother settled out there in the building line. She begged and prayed of me to go; but I said, 'No, Mary, I've my feelings as a mother, but I've my son in England, and I can't cut myself in two; besides which I haven't the constitution for the sea voyage.' She was a good girl to me, was our

Mary, and the first money she ever earned she sent me half of it, and sent me many a little help afterwards. But God took her away very soon. I never saw her pretty face again. Forgive me troubling you, Miss Chamney, but it's a kind of consolation to talk to any one connected with the colonies."

Mrs. Gurner had wept at intervals throughout this speech; and Flora had been moved to pity for this ancient female, whose plum-coloured satin raiment and solicitations to barter had at first disgusted her. Those womanly tears won her compassion, and even respect. With quick tact she divined that it would comfort this desolate old woman to talk to her of her lost daughter. She did not pause to consider that Mrs. Gurner was an intruder, that her presence in that drawing-room was a supreme impertinence. She saw an elderly woman before her, sorrowful and in tears, and her only instinct was to console.

"Where did your daughter settle? In what part of Australia?"

"She was in Hobart Town mostly."

"That was where my dear mother came from," said Flora.

"But she went elsewhere before she died. I don't remember the name of the place; my memory's very poor. She married, and had a daughter, that may have grown up into just such a young lady as you."

"Don't you know her? haven't you seen her? your own granddaughter!"

"No, my dear young lady, there are circumstances—family circumstances—that have kept me and that granddaughter apart; there's complications which I can't explain to a young lady like you. But I should feel I was doing that dear granddaughter an injury if I intruded myself upon her; and there's very little good I could do her to compensate for that injury, so I've learnt to subsidise my own feelings, and keep aloof from her. But it struck me one day that it would be a comfort to me to see you, being almost similarly circumstanced; so I made bold to join business and a grandmother's feelings, and came down here to call upon you; and I hope you'll forgive me, Miss Chamney."

"I don't think there's anything for me to forgive," said Flora gently; "I feel truly sorry for you, strangers as we are."

"Strangers—yes, to be sure," murmured Mrs. Gurner, dabbing her tearful eyes with a ragged Valenciennes-bordered handkerchief, whose corner exhibited a coronet.

"I can feel for your regrets, for I have had a great sorrow myself lately," said Flora mournfully.

"Ah, my sweet young lady, the world's full of sorrow; even the rich can't always escape it, though they come off light in

many things, and at your age the heart is acceptable of suffering" (Mrs. Gurner meant "susceptible"). "Might it have been an unhappy attachment?" she inquired insinuatingly.

"We have lost a dear friend, papa and I," faltered Flora.

"Dear, dear! Lately dead, perhaps."

"We do not even know if he is dead. Sometimes I try to hope that he is still living, that he will come back to us some day. We only know that he is gone."

"Very sad," sighed Mrs. Gurner, contemplating Flora with an inquisitive eye. "But a young lady with your advantages, beauty, and wealth has no call to fret for the loss of one friend, or for the falsehood of one friend. The world is full of friends and lovers for such as you."

Flora looked grave, and felt that she had allowed this plum-coloured person to go too far. She began to wonder how she was to get rid of Mrs. Gurner, who showed no signs of departure.

"Lor, my dear young lady," that matron began, with a philosophical air, "if you only knew how little good there is in young men nowadays—how much badness and double-dealing, and selfishness and mercenariness—you'd never fret after one of *them*. A person in my station, a person that has been brought up as a lady and been drifted down in the world, sees behind the scenes of life. I'm sure there's a young gentleman I used to see a good deal of a month or so ago—quite the gentleman in most of his ways, though lowering himself to the level of a pack of artists about our neighbourhood—quite the gentleman, affable, free with his money, a young man one couldn't help liking, but hollow—nothing genuine in him—all ginger-pop."

Flora looked pained, embarrassed, played with her exercise-book, and glanced beseechingly at Mrs. Gurner, as much as to say, "Please go."

"Perhaps one didn't ought to expect stability of character from an artist," mused the intruder; "a man whose mind was given up to the last picture he had in hand."

Flora looked up, pale and startled, as if the world held only one painter.

"But when a young man comes in and out of your place, and makes himself at home with you, and is friendly and pleasant, it's hard to shut your door upon him. This Mr. Leyburne employed my son in doing up some old pictures for him, and paid liberally. It wasn't my place to object to his visits, even if I did see that his coming so often had a bad effect upon my granddaughter—as handsome a girl as you'd meet at that end of town, and a prudent young woman into the bargain."

Flora's white face stared at the speaker in dumb amazement;

but Mrs. Gurner went on as if unconscious that her words had any unpleasant effect upon her hearer.

"I warned our Loo against setting store by any of Mr. Leyburne's wild speeches, his praises of her beauty, and suchlike. She was the model for his last picture; and he came day after day to paint at our place, and he and she were as happy together, and I left 'em as free as if they'd been brother and sister. A prudent young woman, brought up by a careful grandmother, is above being watched and suspected. I didn't watch Louisa; I didn't suspect her; but I warned her against building upon anything Mr. Leyburne might say to her. And the upshot has proved the truth of my words. Six weeks ago Mr. Leyburne turned his back upon us, and has never crossed the threshold of our door since."

There was a pause, a silence of a minute or so, before Flora was able to speak.

"And you have heard nothing of him—do not even know what has become of him?" she inquired at last.

"No more than the unborn babe. I've gone so far as to inquire at his lodgings in Fitzroy-square, but he hasn't been heard of even there. Now, it strikes me that he felt he'd gone too far with our Loo. I know he was fond of her, and that, as he couldn't bring himself to marry a young woman in such reduced circumstances, he thought the wisest thing for her and for himself was to go clean away. There's countries enough in the world where a man can go and never be heard of in England again, and yet have all the enjoyments and agree-ments of life."

"He is dead, perhaps," said Flora, in a half whisper.

"Well, I've sometimes thought of that. I'd almost sooner believe him dead than think him that cold-blooded he could turn his back upon our Loo, and leave her to break her heart for him."

"Is she very sorry?" asked Flora, in the same unnatural whisper.

"She's never been the same girl since we lost sight of him."

"And you think he really loved her?"

"I don't think it," replied Mrs. Gurner solemnly, "I know it."

Another pause, during which Flora sat motionless, looking blindly at the opposite window, the blue summer sky, the ragged elm-branches tossing to and fro in the light west wind. O, fond foolish dream of love and fidelity, gone for ever! This bereavement was almost worse than the first loss.

"I won't intrude upon you any longer, Miss Chamney," said Mrs. Gurner, rising with her stateliest air, and spreading her

purple robe around her. "I didn't ought to obtrude my family troubles upon you, but your kindness and sympathy opened the floodgates of my sorrow. I 'umbly ask forgiveness, and wish you good morning."

Flora tottered to the bell, rang it with uncertain hand, and then, as the door closed upon Mrs. Gurner, flung herself on the ground—not upon the couch or into Mark's capacious easy-chair, but on the ground itself, in deepest abasement.

What was left her now? Not even memory—not the sad sweet belief that she had once been blest.

"He never loved me," she told herself. "When he asked me to be his wife, he was sacrificing his own inclination to please papa. He loved that common girl—that dreadful woman's granddaughter,—loved her with a low common love for her handsome face. Why should I mourn his death? Why should I feel that the world is empty because he is dead? He is lost to the world, but not to me. He was never mine."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Non, si puissant qu'on soit, non, qu'on rie ou qu'on pleure,
Nul ne te fait parler, nul ne peut avant l'heure
Ouvrir ta froide main,
O fantôme muet, ô notre ombre, ô notre hôte,
Spectre toujours masqué qui nous suis côté à côté,
Et qu'on nomme demain!"

ALL through Loo's first day on board the good ship *Promised Land* the bustle of departure was at its height. The vessel anchored off Gravesend, midway upon the broad sweep of shining water, and exiles who had been determined to get the most out of their own country before departing to a new one joined the ship here. Passengers were continually arriving, and when arrived roamed like restless spirits, and went up and down ladders as if perpetual motion had been imposed upon them by

the iron hand of the law. Emigrants struggling under the burden of straw mattresses, and emigrants jingling bunches of tin pannikins, pervaded the ship from stem to stern. First-class passengers, who had brought mountains of luggage, went distracted on discovering that a cabin would not hold more than its cubical contents. Most of the passengers wanted the chief part of their possessions on the voyage, and many passengers showed more affliction at being severed from the trunks and packing-cases that were shovelled into the hold than at parting from their friends on shore. Second-class passengers expressed their surprise at not being accommodated with bed-rooms and sitting-rooms of twenty feet by fifteen, and proceeded to wall themselves in with their belongings, as if they had been Egyptian mummies about to be withdrawn from the light of day for a few centuries. The young-men emigrants loafed at their end of the deck, smoking short pipes, and wishing themselves fairly under weigh. In the family cabin, midships, the emigrants were collected in little groups—father, mother, and baby, and three or four small children, seated at a narrow deal table, in the low between decks, looking comfortable enough, and the children seeming hardly to wonder at their strange surroundings.

But however many were to be found in the cabins, the perpetual motion on deck, the continuous tramping up and down ladders, went on just the same. The young women were allowed to promenade the poop-deck, and from this elevated position Louisa Gurner surveyed the little world below her thoughtfully. The child-emigrant had found new friends—a family midships where there were children a little younger than herself. And Loo was quite alone—alone and strangely sad as the day wore on, and she thought of that waste of unknown sea that she was going to put between her and the man she loved.

The desire to escape from the chilling atmosphere of Thurlow House had been strong enough to sustain the fugitive up to this point. Emigration, considered as an escape from that dull life, had seemed a grand thing. But now that she had taken the desperate step, enrolled herself in the band of voluntary exiles, emigration—the subject of many a girlish dream—seemed not a little dreary.

It meant lifelong severance from Walter Leyburne, nay, eternal parting. For if she did not remain dear to him on earth, would he seek her in Heaven? And he had loved her; the cup of bliss had been offered to her lips, and she had rejected it.

She remembered that night in the lonely moonlit road, when he had flung wisdom to the winds, and asked her—yes, entreated

her, Louisa Gurner—to be his wife. She had been heroic enough to answer ‘No,’ for she knew that passion prompted him, and she would not yield to a prayer which he might remember with remorse to-morrow. In that one hour Loo had been stronger than her lover. Sublimely unselfish in the exaltation of that hour, she had thought for him and not for herself. She had considered his interests, his future, and had refused him the love that might have been a burden and a hindrance in days to come.

She was as weak as water to-day, as she looked across the bright broad river to the shore that she might never tread again.

“He was so fond of me,” she thought. “He did love me—better than he ever loved that perfect young lady in Fitzroy-square. But I couldn’t bear that he should marry any one so common as I, and change his mind some day, and be sorry to think that he had been caught in a trap, perhaps, by an artful woman. No, I only did what was right.”

And then came the thought that she would never see him again—that rash young dreamer—that ardent lover; never again live the life of that one summer’s day; never live at all any more; for life was something less than life without Walter. She thought how years hence—twenty years, perhaps—she might come back to England, a decent middle-aged woman, who had succeeded pretty well in some humble fashion; and how she would find herself in an altered city, where the streets and public buildings had lost their old familiar aspect; and how she would wander about in search of Walter Leyburne, only to steal a look at his life from the outside—no more. She would see him famous, happy, a husband and father; look at him from among the crowd, herself unknown, unnoticed; and then go back over the wide waters, content to have gone once round the world for the bitter-sweetness of that moment.

Her father, too—the father who had treated her so hardly! Even of him this foolish Loo could not think without sharpest pangs of regret. All the love of early years came back in this pain of parting. The days when the careless vagabond father had been all her narrow world; when his presence had meant life and movement, his absence a dull blank; when the sound of his full baritone voice singing snatches of Italian Opera as he worked made her glad; when to watch him dabbing, sponging, and varnishing at a dirty deal table, littered with oily rags and dirty bottles, was the chief delight of her life. There had been no Walter then; father had seemed just the cleverest, handsomest, most delightful man in the world. True that the atmosphere had become overcharged with electricity now and

then, or that, in vulgar parlance, there had been rows—reproaches, recriminations between mother and son—hard words, unsavoury epithets. Even these had not hardened Loo's heart against her father. She had flung herself into the breach many a time when her grandmother's reproaches were bitterest, and stood by her father, and denied the justice of Mrs. Gurner's accusations.

But that was all over now. She would never see the vagabond father again; never sit like Cinderella among the ashes on a winter's night, darning Jarred's dilapidated socks, and listening to the words of wit or wisdom which dropped from his lips now and then between two puffs of tobacco. How often she had gone into the wet muddy street, in pouring rain, to fetch him beer or tobacco, and had not deemed the service ignoble! What pleasure it had been when he was pleased with the cooking of his savoury supper, and gave her a careless word of praise!

All over now. While she looked across the broad river towards Gravesend, with its background of green hills, her mind's eye beheld the back-parlour in Voysey-street; and that picture of a home gone from her for ever, as she thought, took brightness from the sense of loss. She saw the scene not in its dull reality, but in the colours that it borrowed from her regret.

She went down to the young women's cabin by-and-by, and sat at one of the narrow deal tables to write a letter on a sheet of paper begged from an obliging young emigrant. Loo's scanty outfit did not include writing materials.

She wrote to her father briefly, but with affection, telling him how deep a wrong he had done her when he shut his door upon her, forgiving him that undeserved cruelty, and telling him where she was going.

"Mr. Leyburne has been all that is kind and generous," she wrote, "and has tried to make a lady of me by sending me to boarding-school. But our free-and-easy ways at home had spoiled me for such a life as that, and I thought it would be better for me to go out to Australia and get my own living, like my aunt Mary, whom you so seldom speak of, than to waste Mr. Leyburne's money by staying where I was miserable. Don't be angry with me, father, for taking my own way in life without asking advice from you and grandmother. When you shut your door upon me that night, I felt that I was alone in the world.

"I shall always remember you with love, always regret this parting. Tell grandmother I forgive her for every bitter word she ever said to me. I shall think of her at her kindest. Good-bye, good-bye."

Tears made the end almost illegible. Loo held her head low down over the paper, ashamed that happier emigrants should see her weakness. She carried her letter up on deck, and where the confusion was wildest, at the yawning mouth of the hold, an abyss into which stores were being lowered, she found Mr. Swan, who good-naturedly promised to get her letter posted by the first emissary he sent on shore.

This was in the afternoon. The *Promised Land* was still lying off Gravesend, to sail early next morning.

The day wore on. Mr. Swan went on shore with Loo's letter. It might reach Voysey-street that night, but too late for Jarred to follow his runaway daughter, even if he were inclined. She had not told him the name of the ship that was to carry her away.

"He wouldn't wish to fetch me back," she thought, somewhat sadly. "Even if he hadn't turned me out of doors he would have been glad enough to get rid of me. What do poor people want with children? A child means a mouth to be filled, feet to be shod, a body to be clothed somehow. Grandmother will miss me most, on account of the housework; and it'll seem dull to her without any one to nag at. But she can get a girl to come in for an hour or so of a morning for eighteenpence a week. And she won't have the girl to feed always; so there'll be something saved anyhow."

Easy to slip the cable of family ties and drift away into the new life, where the barque was so lightly anchored. Yet, wretched as the old life was, Loo regretted it more and more keenly as the day wore on. Again the sense of desolation which she had felt at Thurlow House came back to her. The people about her were not unfriendly. There was no scorn in the looks that met hers on board the *Promised Land*; but they had all their own ties, their own hopes, their own troubles, their own joys. She belonged to no one; and she was a plant of deeper root than the child emigrant; she could not be so easily transferred to a new soil.

She stayed on deck till nightfall, gazing at those green hills, with the foreground of roofs and chimneys, many-coloured in the declining light—gazed as a fallen angel might gaze at the paradise from which she was banished. How lovely the English landscape seemed to the exile's eye! She who had seen so little of her native land, whose knowledge of its beauties went no farther than Epping, Hampstead, and that never-to-be-forgotten glimpse of the fair villages beside the Thames, beheld this wide sweep of river, those verdant Kentish hills, with rapture.

This was the land she was going to leave. Her heart yearned towards that English coast as if it had been a living thing.

Night closed in; lights began to twinkle here and there in the shadowy town; there a bright line that showed the lamplit street, there the ruddier gleam of household fires. The exile's heart sickened as she thought how long it would be ere she would again see lights as homelike and friendly; how, for weeks and months to come, life would be illumined only by the regulation lamps of the *Promised Land*; how her way would be over the barren waste of waters, journeying among strangers to a strange land.

There had been a good many visitors to the ship in the course of the day, an army of explorers urged by an amiable curiosity about the ways and means of emigrants, combined with a natural desire for a day's outing and a good dinner. Ladies of a philanthropic turn had pried and peered and wondered and exclaimed, until some of the emigrants had gone so far as to say that sea-sickness would be a relief after this kind of thing. There had been feasting and high-jinks in the cuddy, healths drunk, speeches made, and an immense deal of conviviality among people who were not going to make the voyage, and who were somewhat inclined to regard the *Promised Land* as a floating tavern where there was no reckoning—a *pays de cocagne* upon the waters.

The festivities were nearly over now. Darkness—only soft summer darkness—had descended on the deck. Lamps were lighted in the cuddy, where the visitors, determined to get all they could out of the vessel, were drinking tea, prior to departure. The boats were waiting at the bottom of the accommodation-ladder to convey these strangers back to Gravesend, bobbing gently up and down with the movement of the light waves. Loo, from her post on the poop, looked down at the boats, and heard the voices of the visitors through the open skylight of the cuddy.

"They are not going to leave England," she thought sadly, as the sound of their laughter grew louder.

Her heart was growing heavier as the hours wore on. She had never contemplated the possibility of drawing back, yet that pain at her heart grew sharper now that the step she had taken seemed irrevocable. An official was going his round among the emigrants to collect the second half of their passage-money. He would come to her presently, and then only four pounds would remain to her out of Walter's parting gift.

Her eyes still fondly turned towards that mother country she was about to abandon. The shore grew darker, the hills almost melted into the soft gloom of night, the lights twinkled more gaily.

"Dear old England!" said Loo; "to think that I should be

so fond of it—to think that I should care even for Voysey-street which I used to abuse so often while I lived there.”

The visitors emerged from the cabin hilarious, but somewhat fearful of the unknown without, the narrow ways midships, faintly lighted by a lantern here and there, the yawning abyss opening to realms below, the general insecurity of footing. Kindly officers helped the strangers up ladders. There was a great deal of confusion in getting the departing guests together. Young ladies shriek their loudest, urged by playfulness or timidity; strong arms were in request. Mr. Swan quoted Shakespeare at a positively bewildering rate.

In the crowd and bustle, and mingled alarm and hilarity, no one observed a slim dark figure which was alien to the visitors. The party was large, and everybody supposed that plainly-dressed young woman, with a veil drawn tightly across her face, belonged to somebody else. She was handed down the accommodation-ladder without a word of interrogation, took her place among other young women in the crowded boat, looked back at the ship towering high above her as the boat shot off, and a hearty cheer rose from the darkness of the deck, a friendly farewell to the departing guests.

The gentlemen were talkative, and even noisy, during the brief transit. The ladies held their peace, and had faint suggestions of sea-sickness. No one observed the strange young woman, till they were all landing, when, as soon her foot touched the shore, the damsel stepped swiftly away, and vanished in the darkness of the night.

“Who was that?” asked one of the party, wondering at this abrupt departure. They were all bound for the railway station, and intended to keep together till they arrived there.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. I thought she was with you,” answered another.

“Some friend of one of the passengers, perhaps.”

“I suppose so.”

And no one thought any more about the strange young woman.

The strange young woman was that child of impulse, Louisa Gurner. Just at the final moment, when the last of the visitors was being hustled down the ladder, a wild longing to return had seized her. She sprang lightly down the steps from the poop and ran to the gangway, was grasped by a strong-armed sailor and hoisted on to the ladder, and had taken her seat in the boat before any one had time to ask who she was. As she had fled from the advantages of humane letters, so she fled from the benefits of emigration, and leaving half her passage-money, and all her little stock of clothing, behind her,

turned her back upon the good ship *Promised Land*, and all the chances of fortune that might have awaited her in England's youngest and sturdiest colony.

She ran for some little way after leaving the landing-place, having some vague fear that she might be pursued, and taken back to the ship by force. That ticket which she had received in exchange for her eight sovereigns might in some manner bind her to the Queensland government; to take the first step in emigration might be as fatal as to take the Queen's shilling.

About half a mile from the water's edge she paused, breathless, and looked about her. She was in a dark road just outside Gravesend; not a creature within sight, no sound of pursuit, alone under the still dark night. She began to breathe more freely, felt that she was verily free—not bound apprentice either to education or emigration; free to go whither she listed, free to go back to Voysey-street.

Yes, it all came to that. It was the old shabby sordid home for which her soul languished, the old domestic affection, the home in which she had first seen Walter Leyburne.

"I shall see him again," she said to herself: "no wide sea shall roll between us, no ship shall carry me away from him. I forgot how much I love him when I thought that I could bear my life beyond reach of him. I only want to see him now and then."

She thought of the father who had turned her out of doors—not the most hopeful prospect in the world, perhaps, return to such a father. But Loo was not dispirited even by this thought. She remembered that Jarred Gurner's anger, though violent, had ever been brief. Doubtless he had many a time repented himself of his injustice since that memorable night. He would not shut his door upon her again.

Or at the worst, if he did, she could find a lodging in Voysey-street; she could learn dressmaking; she could go out charing; she could do something for a living. No labour would lack sweetness if she but stayed in the land that held her lover.

It was late by this time; she did not like to go to the railway station lest she should meet the people from the ship, and find herself delivered over to some emissary of the Queensland government, to be carried off, willy-nilly, like those victims who were kidnapped for the West Indian plantations, in the good old times. So she walked on, thinking of home and Walter, and happy, along the lonely high-road, till the late moon rose and beheld her on the top of Gad's-hill, whence she looked down wonderingly over the fair sweep of landscape, the broad winding river shining under that summer moon.

She had walked a good many miles, but had hardly any sense

of fatigue, and pushed on bravely, seeing no house where she could seek a night's shelter till she came, very late, into Strood, so late that she was not a little fearful of having to wander about all night. The nights were short, happily, and she could go back to London next morning by the earliest train that left the station.

Yes, it was too late to seek for shelter; it was morning already. The sonorous bell of Rochester Cathedral tolled one as Louisa entered the humble outskirts of Strood, too late for bed, for supper, or refreshment of any kind. Strood was silent as a street of tombs. Loo was tired, but made up her mind placidly enough to stroll about till the station was open, and she could find a friendly shelter in the waiting-room.

She went upon the bridge, and stood looking at the river, the hills, the tall gloomy walls of Rochester Castle. How fair all appeared in the moonlight! And this was the land she had been so eager to leave yesterday morning.

"Thank God," she ejaculated, as she gazed with wide rapturous eyes at the varied prospect. "I would rather go about in a cart and sell brooms than leave England."

She lingered on the bridge, and then walked slowly through the silent town, interested, pleased by the novel scene, and with no sense of desolation in that lonely walk in the middle watch of the night. Her vigorous mind was not dependent on commonplace companionship for pleasure; the mere strangeness and quaint beauty of the old town were enough to satisfy her. Her soul was full of a placid joy. She was going back to Voysey-street, and she would see Walter again. That thought sustained her; she felt neither the faintness of hunger nor the awful loneliness of the night.

She went round the cathedral, looking up at its dark walls, and walked through narrow ways where there are grave sober-looking old houses of mediæval type, to the Maidstone road, then in the cold gray morning made her way back to the town and to the station.

There was an early train for London, a train that started a few minutes after five. Loo took a third-class ticket—she was chary of spending her money lest she should have to begin the world on that small fortune—and found herself among labouring men in smock frocks, and market-garden women who got in and out at every small station.

The journey seemed long to Loo's impatience. There were so many stoppages, so much delay, and she yearned so for the end of her journey. How would they greet her, those two on whom alone she had the claim of kindred? As the end came nearer, doubts she had not known before arose to torment her.

That bitter memory of Jarred's repudiation of her took a darker colour. What if there should be no welcome for her,—only silence, stern averted looks, condemnation? Her absence might give ground for the vilest suspicions. Her father might refuse to hear her explanation.

At the worst there was Walter—he would not misjudge her.

Yet even he would be angry at this foolish escapade. He had taken so much trouble to place her in the right path, and might hardly forgive her for deserting it. The future grew cloudy as the train drew nearer London, almost as if her thoughts took their colour from the smoke-tainted sky.

It was early when she came out of the station into the street, where huge waggons were rumbling by, cabs shooting among them, and the noise of life already begun. Not too early for an omnibus, she found one to convey her as far as Tottenham-court-road, whence it was an easy walk to Voysey-street.

Her spirits sank still lower during that slow progress through the town, with its everlasting stoppages, takings-up and settings-down. It was a relief to leave the omnibus, and pursue her journey on foot, tired as she was with last night's wanderings, for now at least there was nothing but her own weakness to delay her progress.

Even now the way seemed long, but at last, at last she entered the shabby old street, whose width of carriage way was usurped by disreputable-looking fowls—birds which, from the proud races of Spain and Dorking, had degenerated into London Arabs; ragged Cochin-Chinas, too, which looked shabby and degraded, like over-worked dromedaries. How familiar the scene appeared, and yet how strange, after the month's absence, which seemed like an absence of years! If she had been returning from India after ten years' exile she could hardly have been more deeply moved at sight of her childhood's home.

It was nine o'clock, breakfast-time for the more luxurious and Bohemian among the inhabitants—Jarred's breakfast-time in ordinary; after a late night he was wont to breakfast at noon, or perchance to dispense with that meal altogether.

The well-known door—whose threshold she had hearthstoned so often—stood open to the summer air. There was a half-glass door inside, with a cracked alarm bell communicating with the shop. There hung the too-familiar stock-in-trade—the plum-coloured satin, the mangy sable tippet, the ragged Limerick lace shawl, the black-velvet mantle with shiny streaks here and there, like the track of an errant snail—mantle much begimped

and befringed. "The trimmings were worth all the money," Mrs. Gurner said.

The passage smelt of bloaters—Jarred's customary relish at this time of year. That odour of bloaters and coffee and buttered toast intensified Loo's hunger. She had eaten nothing since the afternoon meal on board the *Promised Land*, and had been in the open air for the last fifteen hours. She went along the little bit of dusky passage, and opened the back-parlour door. Not all at once did she venture to go in, but stood on the threshold contemplating the home-picture presented to her gaze.

The press-bedstead had been turned up hastily, whereby a blanket of dubious colour oozed out of the ill-closed structure. A tall tin coffee-pot simmered on a trivet in front of the small grate; a bloater of aldermanic dimensions hissed and spluttered in the frying-pan: a plate of substantial buttered toast basked in the genial glow of the fire. Jarred, in shirt-sleeves, a pair of ancient morocco slippers, that had once been crimson, lolled in the big arm-chair, reading the *Daily Telegraph*, while the bloater fried, and the toast, in Mrs. Gurner's phrase, "mellowed."

The lady herself was standing before a chest of drawers, engaged in the interesting occupation of curling her front hair, which, being of a convenient and adaptable form, was tied on to the handle of a drawer, to give purchase for the brush and comb. The place of this essential attribute of lovely woman was supplied meanwhile by a frilled nightcap, with a red-and-yellow bandannah handkerchief tied across it, which Mrs. Gurner was wont to wear when in *deshabille*.

"Father!" said Loo appealingly, after a moment's pause.

Jarred flung down his paper, sprang to his feet, crossed the room in two strides, and took his daughter in his arms.

"My girl, my poor lass!" he cried. "Thank God, you've come back. I was a brute, Loo: but I meant it for your good. I thought I was making your fortune; I thought it was the safest way to make him marry you straight off the reel."

"You almost broke my heart, father."

"Mine hasn't been uncommonly easy since that night, Loo. And when I got your letter by post this morning, to tell me you'd emigrated——"

"Following the example of your pore aunt Mary," sighed Mrs. Gurner, who had left the ringlets to hang unfinished from the knob to which she had attached them.

"Well, I thought that was about the worst turn Fate had done me yet, Loo."

"And are you really glad to have me back, father? And

may I stop with you, and keep your place tidy, as I used to do?"

"Of course, my girl; sit down and eat your breakfast.—You'll poison the place, if you let that bloater burn any longer, mother," added Mr. Gurner, whose nostrils were offended by an unpleasant odour of frizzled fish.

Loo sat down by her father, as she had been wont to do in the sunniest days of her past, when Fortune had favoured Jarred with a transient smile, and his temper was at its best. But before she could eat, she must ask one question.

"Have you seen Mr. Leyburne lately, father?"

"No, child. That's a long story, and a painful one. I'd rather tell it you by-and-by."

The happy look faded out of Loo's face.

"Is there anything wrong, father?" I thought it all seemed too happy, coming home like this and you so glad to see me! Is there anything wrong—with him?"

"Something very much wrong, Loo."

"Is he ill?"

No answer. But looks interchanged between Jarred and his mother.

"Is he—dead?"

Still no answer. Jarred looked away from the questioner, and spoke not a word. Loo flung up her arms with a cry of agony, and turned her face to the wall.

CHAPTER XXV.

Le voyage qu'ils font n'a ni soleil, ni lune,
Nul homme n'y peut rien porter de sa fortune,
Tant le maître est jaloux !
Le voyage qu'ils font est profond et sans bornes ;
On le fait à pas lents parmi des faces mornes ;
Et nous le ferons tous !”

“ Your fearful minds are thick and misty then ;
For there sits Death—there sits imperious Death.”

A DULL leaden sorrow weighed down Flora's heart after that interview with Mrs. Gurner. There had been a sad sweetness in her grief for the lover she had believed true; a tender mournfulness in every tear; for those tears had seemed tribute paid to the lost, and she had deemed her dead worthy of all tribute. But in the grief she felt for the man who had been false to her there was nothing but bitterness—the galling sense of self-scorn. Henceforward she was ashamed of her sorrow, and shed her tears in secret, and never more breathed her lover's name, save to God in passionate prayers for the healing balm of forgetfulness. A change came over her from this time; but a change so subtle that no eye except Dr. Ollivant's noted the transformation. There was a growing womanliness in her manner. That chilklike sweetness which had first bewitched the strong man's senses, till, all unawares, his heart was won, seemed to have passed out of the girl's nature. She held her head higher, and there was a proud cold look in those eyes, whose expression had once been all softness and pleading. Flora had never been conscious of her pride till it had been outraged: but she wore her new sorrow like the proudest of women.

Ignorant of the cause of this change, Dr. Ollivant lost himself in speculation about it. Had Flora discovered all at once that her lover had never been worthy of her, and resolved to put away her grief? Had she developed the truth out of her inner consciousness, after steadfastly refusing to be convinced by him, Cuthbert Ollivant? He knew not what to think, and dared not question the subject of his doubts. Was it not sufficient bliss for him to be tolerated by her? and so long as

she suffered him in her company had he not ample reason for content? *Ohne hast, ohne rast!* was his watch-cry. His single hope lay in patience.

Not by a word did Flora betray her lost lover's secret. She told her father nothing of Mrs. Gurner's visit. She gathered her shaken senses together an hour or two after that reduced gentlewoman's departure, and took Tiny for an airing in the Broad Walk, so as to come in with a breath of fresh air about her when her father returned from the City. Only her pallid cheeks betrayed the mental torture of those three hours.

"Why, Baby, you are paler than ever to-day!" said the fond father, as he kissed her; "I am afraid Kensington does not agree with you."

"I don't think it does particularly well, papa."

"Relaxing," said Mark gravely. "We'll go to Hampstead."

"No, no, papa; that would be too cold for you."

"No, love, not on this side of November. Ollivant told me a few days ago that he thought a bracing air would suit me. We'll try Hampstead."

Flora gave a little sigh of relief. It would be something to have done with that drawing-room, which had been in a manner poisoned by Mrs. Gurner's presence. That sofa yonder, on the edge whereof she had sat primly, evoked her image. Strange how grief infects chairs and tables!

The contemplated change of quarters was discussed with Dr. Ollivant that evening.

"You are tired of Kensington, then?" he said to Flora.

"I don't care much for it," she answered listlessly.

"Yet you could hardly have pleasanter rooms, or a gayer prospect."

"Is it gay to see people one knows nothing about riding backwards and forwards?" she asked; "cantering up and down, up and down, as if there were no such thing as care in the world? I think I would rather live in a forest, where there was nothing but tall black pine-trees under a winter sky."

"I fancy you would soon be tired of the forest. However, let us try Hampstead. The bracing air may suit you and your papa both."

He said not a word of the trouble to himself involved in this change—his longer journey to and fro. He was thankful that Flora did not ask to leave the neighbourhood of London altogether. A mile or two more or less would make little difference to him.

She went on with her education bravely after that revelation of Walter Leyburne's falsehood; pinned herself to her taskwork, attacked verbs and declensions, idioms and inversions, with a

will. She wished to thrust her lost lover's image out of her mind—to leave no room for fatal memories. Yet he was with her too often, despite her endeavours. His *eidolon* hovered over her as she sat at her desk, just as he had stood beside her easel a few weeks ago. Sometimes she looked round, with a wild fancy that she would verily see him standing there in the flesh; she had felt an overpowering sense of his presence, almost amounting to conviction, and listened, trembling, half expecting to hear his voice. Invisible, impalpable, he might yet speak to her.

She had vague thoughts of spiritualism—commune with the dead. But these she laughed to scorn in her colder moments; reminding herself that, since he had never really loved her, there could be no sympathy between them strong enough to draw the dead to the living, no link to bring him near to her. His wandering soul would flutter back to the girl he had really loved, and find its nest in that vulgar bosom. Not to her, not to her who had loved him so fondly, would his spirit return.

No amateur preceptor could have desired a more industrious pupil. Indeed Dr. Ollivant had to recommend less devotion to Horace and Linnæus, the flowers and the stars. The girl's mind ripened rapidly in this intellectual forcing-house. She only read the books the doctor brought her, and those were all of the highest order of literature. The mighty world of natural science opened before her, and there were brief intervals of her life in which, lost in wonder at the marvels of the universe, she forgot how much she had lost in that particular unit whose disappearance had made earth desolate.

They explored Hampstead and its environs, and found an old-fashioned cottage at West-end, in a curious little rural nook, where there were a few pretty old houses, which seemed to have gone astray from somewhere else, and halted there in a fanciful purposeless way; the spot being remote from church and post-office, and all the vulgar necessities of life in the way of butcher's-meat and chandlery.

The house Mr. Chamney hired was a low rambling place, with crinkled rough-cast walls, and a great many beams about it; a cottage set in an odd triangular garden protected by a dense hedge of greenest holly; a garden where the dahlias, which are the banners of autumn's advance-guard, were flaming gaily already.

Flora was inclined to be charmed with the place for the first minute, and then averted her weary eyes from its beauties with a stifled sigh. She thought how Walter would have admired the pretty rustic dwelling, how fair a background it would have made for one of his favourite *genre* pictures. What was its

fairness worth to her without Walter—that Walter who had never been hers?

Mark was pleased with the rusticity of the spot.

"I shall almost feel as if I was at our old station on the Darling Downs again," he said, "where we used to see a stranger once in three months or so. It'll seem quite nice to be ever so far away from the butcher, and to have to ride into Hampstead for stores."

Flora brightened at her father's pleasure. After all, she had him; he who had never ceased to love her; whose thoughts, from the day of her birth, had been all love for her. Could she be so wicked as to repine, to think life empty, because of a loss that was no loss, only the end of a deception, only the awakening from a fond and foolish dream?

She told herself that she would be happy henceforward, that she would make the most of life with her father. That happiness was left to her, and even that might be brief. She flung one wild despairing glance forward to days to come, when she might weep and lament amidst a deeper desolation than her mind could compass now—fatherless.

Day by day she acquired stronger command over herself, and seemed to live only to please and pet her father. Never was a man so worshipped by an only daughter as Mark Chamney by this pale thoughtful girl, with the grave eyes and pensive mouth. To Cuthbert her conduct was inexpressibly beautiful. He saw the girlish stoic doing silent battle with her grief, conquering her womanly heart by the force of filial love.

"She is beyond all measure lovely; she is a woman above all other women; and I am justified in giving her a measureless, love," thought the doctor as he rode back to Wimpole-street, after an evening at West-end. He spent all his evenings there, just as he had done at Kensington Gore, and he rode to and fro, as the quickest way of travelling—rode back to town late on dark starless nights, when the Finchley-road was silent as the wild sheep-walks of Queensland.

One day Mr. Chamney proposed that Flora should take to riding. The pale wan look of her face alarmed him. She smiled at him, but her smiles were cheerless. It would be good for her to canter along those pretty rustic roads and lanes which lay between West-end and Edgeware. The doctor was on the alert at once, and volunteered to find her a clever hack, with a canter as easy as the slumberous swing of a rocking-horse, and none of those vicious proclivities which are wont to distinguish the equine race. Mark insisted upon having a hand in the selection; and the two men met in the City one morning, and had various animals paraded before them, till their choice fell upon a well-fed-looking

bay mare, with a mild and cow-like temperament; a lymphatic animal, tranquil-minded as a childless widow with money in the Funds, whose business in life was to look prosperous and pretty.

Flora was grateful, and tried to seem glad. Perhaps this gift of the horse—a living, loving creature, whose dark full eyes looked at her gently, and whose velvet nostrils seemed to thrill under her caressing touch—was just the wisest offering her father could have made her. Her step grew lighter as she ran backwards and forwards to Titania's stable—the cow-like bay had been named Titania; the wide landscape, the fresh clear air gave her new life, and brought a faint glow to the white cheeks, and some touch of the old rose tint to the pale lips. She had learned the polite art of horsemanship, with a select class of young ladies, at a Notting-hill riding-school during her tutelage at Miss Mayduke's; learned to canter gracefully over the tan of a circular shed, and even to jump over a low bar. Under the doctor's tuition she acquired complete mastery over the mild Titania, and in due time ceased to be stricken with a kind of mental palsy at the sight of an omnibus or a waggon bearing down upon her.

Kind as the doctor was, however, Flora carefully avoided riding alone with him. She had an ever-present dread of a repetition of the scene in Tadmor churchyard whenever they two were left alone together. So when the doctor spared an afternoon for a ride, she contrived that her father should be with them on an honest weight-carrying roadster he had bought for the groom, and at other times she rode in the early morning with the groom for her attendant and protector. Her health improved from this time forward; and what with long rustic rides, study, reading aloud to her father, devoted attention to his simple wants, and housekeeping, the mysteries whereof she was gradually acquiring, Flora had little time for nursing her secret life. God's healing balm of oblivion had been given to her in some small measure. Her sorrow awoke at times, and stung the soft heart where it nestled, but it was an endurable sorrow.

"I have my father," she said to herself; "I ought to be happy." And hand in hand with this thought went the hope that her father would be spared to her for years to come. She had lost so much, Heaven would surely leave her the remnant of her happiness.

The first chill winds of October were the signal for a new change of abode. Sweet as West-end Cottage was, Dr. Ollivant suggested its abandonment. Mr. Chamney must winter in a milder climate. Pinemouth, in Hampshire, would suit him admirably. The doctor was careful not to hint at a Devonian

watering-place. So it was settled that they should start for Pinemouth on the twentieth, the doctor promising to secure rooms for them, and to make all things smooth.

"I shall miss my evenings sadly," he said, "and my pupil."

"You can run down to us sometimes, perhaps," suggested Mark.

"Perhaps now and then for a few hours on a Sunday."

"That would hardly be worth your while," said Mark.

"O, yes, it would," replied the doctor with his quiet smile: "I should not think the journey wasted trouble, believe me. But I must not give myself as much latitude as I did in the summer. My absences were too long, and I had to endure some very severe reproaches when I came home; especially from the patients who have nothing particular the matter with them."

Flora had taken her last long ride through the lovely lanes, her last quiet walk with her father on the Heath at sunset, and all was ready for their journey to Pinemouth, when something happened which made the journey impossible, and rooted them to West-end Cottage.

Mark Chamney's chronic cough, which the doctor had watched with some uneasiness—not a particularly bad cough in itself, but alarming in such a patient—suddenly developed into a sharp attack of bronchitis. Mark had caught cold, somehow, in spite of his daughter's unvarying care; some wandering blast among the winds that blow had pierced him, as with the shaft of death. He took to his bed in the old-fashioned lattice-windowed chamber, looking towards the green pastures of Finchley and Harrow's wooded hill. From the first, Cuthbert Ollivant knew pretty well what the end must be. But how was he to tell Flora, whose pleading eyes piteously supplicated words of hope and comfort? Should he tell her the truth at all? Rather let her feel the last ray of life's sunset, beguiled to the very end by hope; better for the patient's feeble chance of lengthened days—better, perhaps, for herself. When the blow came, strength to suffer would come to her somehow from that presiding Power whereof the doctor thought but vaguely. He told her none of his fears therefore, but gave her as much comfort as he dared, without actual falsehood. He would not give her power to turn upon him by-and-by and say, "You deceived me." He would not give her reason to despise him.

Mrs. Ollivant came down to West-end to help in the task of nursing—or perhaps rather to take care of Flora, who needed all the care affection could give her, as the days went by without bringing signs of recovery, and the awful possibility hanging over her began to shape itself in the girl's mind.

Day after day, as Mark grew weaker, less able to speak to her,

more prone to intervals of wandering speech and brief and broken slumbers, Flora asked Dr. Ollivant the same agonizing question, "Is there danger?" For a week he fenced with the difficulty, replied in language for the most part technical, which left doubt and even hope in the questioner's mind. But at last there came one fateful morning when he must either lie to her utterly, or tell her the dismal truth. Yes, there was peril; it was doubtful if she would have her father with her many more days.

She shed no tear. Her heart seemed to stand still, all her senses to be benumbed for the moment, at the leaden touch of that unspeakable grief. Lip and cheek whitened, and she stood looking at the doctor dumbly, while he yearned to take her to his breast and comfort her, with tears and kisses and tender pitying words, as such a child should be comforted.

"Why does not God take me too?" she said at last; "He would if He were merciful."

"My love, we must not question his mercy," exclaimed Mrs. Ollivant, with a shocked look, putting her arms round the girl. "All his acts are good and wise, even when He robs us of our dearest."

Flora pushed her away.

"How dare you preach that to me?" she cried passionately. "Is it good to part us two, who are all the world to each other? Why may not I die too? What use am I in the world? When he is gone, there will be no one left who cares for me."

"Flora, you know that is not true," said the doctor with grave reproach. It was the first time he had ever hinted at his secret since that day in Tadmor churchyard.

"No one whom I care for, at any rate," said Flora cruelly. She had no mercy upon any one in her great agony—hated every one who seemed, even by way of consolation, to come between her and her dying father. How dared they seek to lessen her grief? How could she ever grieve enough for him?

She broke from Mrs. Ollivant's restraining arms, and flew up stairs to her father's room, and crouched down by his bed, determined never more to leave his side. The last hours of that ebbing life should be hers, and hers only. The doctor had brought in a trained nurse, mild and skilful; but Flora was jealous of the hireling's ministrations, and would hardly suffer her help.

One evening, after a day of weakness and fitful slumber, Mark seemed better than he had been from the beginning of his illness—his brain clearer, his voice stronger. It was but one of those latest flashes of the vital spark which illuminate the dusk

of life's close; but to Flora it seemed a promise of recovery. Her eyes shone with newly-kindled hope; she trembled with the wild joy that thrilled through every vein. He was better—he would live. The awful doom would be averted.

Mark stretched out his wasted hand uncertainly, seeking hers. She clasped and kissed it.

"My love, I am glad you are so near me."

"I am never away from you, dear father. I will never leave you till you are well and strong again."

"O my poor child, that will never be."

"Yes, yes, papa; you are better to-night."

"My mind is clearer, my darling. God has given me an interval of reason after all those troublesome dreams—strange meaningless dreams—that bewilder and oppress me. I can think clearly to-night. I want to talk about your future, Flora."

"Our future, papa," she said piteously; "I have no future without you."

"My dearest love, you will live and try to be a bright happy woman—useful to others, as a woman should be—for my sake. Perhaps in that dim world where death is leading me, I may have some knowledge of your life. If that be so, how sweet it will be to me to know that my darling is fulfilling a woman's fairest destiny—loving and beloved—happy wife, happy mother!"

"Papa, papa, you are torturing me! I live only for you—I have no earthly hope but in you!"

"Where is Ollivant?"

Was his mind beginning to wander again? she thought, the question seemed so wide of their previous talk.

"Down-stairs, papa. He is here every evening, you know."

"Ring the bell, Baby. I want to talk to him."

She obeyed, and Cuthbert came swiftly in answer to her summons. He sat down by the bed on the side opposite Flora, and Mark extended the other feeble hand to his old school-fellow.

"That's well, Cuthbert," he said; "I want you with me, as well as my darling—my cherished only child. It seems a hard thing to leave her quite alone in the world—friendless, unprotected."

"She can never be that while I live," answered the doctor eagerly. "Have you not asked me to be her guardian, and am I not pledged to guard and cherish her so long as I live?"

"I know, I know," said Mark dreamily; "but there's something else."

He lapsed into silence, his hands still lying wide apart, one in Flora's clasp, the other grasped tight in Cuthbert's sinewy fingers. Neither of them spoke to him: his words, his breath were too precious. Flora sat watching his face in the dim light of the distant solitary candle. They had been careful to keep the light subdued.

"If I hadn't trusted you, do you think I should ever have given you such a charge, Cuthbert?" Mark asked at length.

"I have been—I shall be—worthy of *that* trust," answered Dr. Ollivant; "wherever else I may fail, I shall not fail in that."

"I believe it. What if I were to make it a greater trust, a more sacred charge? What if I have read your secret, Cuthbert?"

"Papa!" cried Flora pleadingly.

"My love, I must speak freely. There is a time in every man's life when conventional restraint must end. Yes, Ollivant, I know your secret. Such devotion as you have shown has a deeper root than friendship. I have read the truth in that grave face of yours, honestly as you have tried to hide it. You are more than my little girl's guardian. You are her lover."

"Papa, how can you be so cruel, when you know——"

"Yes, a girl's fleeting fancy. Why should it be the blight of a woman's life? My pet, you were created to bless an honest man's home; and my old friend loves you—loves you as your first lover never had the power to love."

"God knows it is true!" said Cuthbert, and no word beyond. The dying father was pleading his cause better than he could have pleaded it. There is no earthly wisdom higher than that clear light which comes when death waits at the door.

"Take her for your wife, Ollivant; there is no other kind of guardianship that can fitly shield her from the storms of fate. You have won her fairly. The husband I chose for her is dead and gone, and has been mourned sincerely. My child will not gainsay her father's last wish, her father's last prayer. Let me put these two hands together as the closing act of my life."

He drew those opposite hands feebly towards his breast, across the narrow bed. Easy enough to resist that feeble movement, yet which of those two could have the heart to oppose him? The hands met—one with a thrill that was sharp as pain; the other dull, inert, uncomplaining, although unresisting.

"There, children," said Mark, "that is a kind of sacrament. Let neither of you forget this moment. If there is any thought or knowledge in the grave, I shall think of you united and happy."

Flora drew her hand gently from Dr. Ollivant's, and knelt down by the bed, sobbing.

"Papa," she cried, when the words could come, "live for my sake. Life and the world would be hateful to me without you. I cannot care for any one else—I cannot think of any one else. I have but one buried love—and yours. If I lose you, I lose all."

"Hush!" said her father gently; "at your age life is but beginning. Perhaps while they are lying warm and dark in their cocoons the butterflies think that life would be bleak without that shelter; yet see how happily they flutter in the sunshine when the poor old husk is decayed and forgotten."

And with this simile Mark Chamney sank into a gentle slumber, from which he woke no more in this lower world—a sleep so tranquil that only Flora, against whose breast his head reposed, heard the last long-drawn sigh.

In the bleak autumnal dawn Cuthbert Ollivant found her sitting on the bed with her dead father in her arms, tearless, and with a blank white face whose aspect filled him with terror. It was like the face of one whose reason trembled in the balance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"'Tis time that I should loose from life at last
This heart's unworthy longing for the past,
Ere life be turn'd to loathing;
For love—at least, this love of one for one—
Is, at the best, not all beneath the sun;
And, at the worst, 'tis nothing."

MRS. OLLIVANT took Flora to Wimpole-street, and for many weeks the girl lay in an upper chamber of that quiet old house, carefully tended and watched and ministered to, and in sore need of such care. Heart and brain were too nearly allied for one to go unscathed when the other was desolated. The blow that fell so heavily on the loving heart struck the mind as well, and for a time all seemed ruin. Nothing less than Dr. Ollivant's skill and Dr. Ollivant's care would perhaps have saved mind or life; but his patience and his skill were victorious. The girl awoke from the long night of brain fever one bleak snowy day in midwinter, and looked curiously round at the unfamiliar room, wondering where she was.

It was a neatly-furnished chamber, square and formal, everything in its place, not a line of the fair dimity drapery awry. The furniture had an old-fashioned look—a tall mahogany bureau, a mahogany chest of drawers, both with bright brass handles which reflected the glow of a cheerful fire. Old-fashioned coloured engravings of the four seasons, in oval gilt frames, adorned the neatly-papered wall. A sofa covered with dimity, an easy-chair with the same spotless covering, a small spindle-legged table, on which there was an old dragon-china plate with a cut orange, a shining brass fender—the snow-flakes drifting against the square window-panes, the blind half-drawn down, the sober sombre comfort of the room—Flora noted all these details; but not with eager curiosity; rather with a listless half-awakened interest.

Where was she? Was this Miss Mayduke's own sacred bed-chamber, that awful temple, whose closed portal she had passed, reverential almost to trembling? A girl must be seriously ill to be removed to that sacred sanctuary. Flora began to think that she must have had scarlet fever, or some dangerous disease, and that she had been brought here in her extremity,

as to a refuge where Death would hardly dare to pursue her. Surely the King of Terrors himself must have some awe of Miss Mayduke.

It happened strangely that throughout this illness of Flora's all her thoughts and fancies had gone backward to her girlish, nay even childish, days at the Notting-hill academy. Lessons, breaking-up dances, juvenile friendships, holiday amusements occupied her wandering thoughts. She mistook her nurses for the teachers at Miss Mayduke's—she worried her distracted brain with anxieties about lessons unlearned, music that she had not practised. That year of womanhood, which held all the events of her life, seemed to have slipped from her memory altogether. The people she talked of were people she had known years ago, when she was quite a little girl; and insignificant circumstances that had been forgotten hitherto were remembered now minutely, as if they had been things of yesterday.

To-day, for the first time, a fold of the dark curtain that had hung over her brain was lifted—for the first time since she had been lying there she thought of her father.

"Why does not papa come to see me?" she wondered. "Miss Mayduke ought to have sent for him."

She turned wearily in her bed, disturbed by the thought. A woman in a gray gown and a muslin cap came out of an adjoining room, the door of which had been left open; for not for a moment had the patient been left unguarded. Dr. Ollivant had told the sick-nurse to sit in the little dressing-room, where she could hear and even see her charge, without being seen by her; so that Flora might not be worried by the sight of a strange woman sitting watching her by day and night.

"Where is papa?" asked Flora.

"I don't know, miss."

"Send for him, please. Ask Miss Mayduke to send for him directly. Are you the English teacher? Why do you wear a cap? Miss Bonford didn't. I don't like teachers in caps, looking just like servants."

The nurse rang the bell, but did not leave the room.

"Why don't you go and fetch him? Why don't you fetch my papa? It's very unkind of Miss Mayduke to let me be so ill and not send for him. I'm sure he'll be angry."

The door opened and Dr. Ollivant came in. Flora looked at him and did not know him.

"I think her mind is coming quite clear, sir," whispered the nurse; "she's been asking me about her papa."

"She does not know me," said the doctor, with a sigh. He had so longed for one glance of recognition from those sad eyes.

She stared at him blankly, as if he had been a stranger, just as she had looked at him the morning her father died.

He seated himself by the bedside, and took her unresisting hand.

"If you are the doctor, please send for papa," she said.

"I am your doctor," he answered gently, with his fingers on her pulse, noting its slackened and more regular beat. "Don't you think you could remember my name if you tried?"

"No," she said listlessly; "you are not Mr. Judson."

Mr. Judson was the bland apothecary who had attended Miss Mayduke's young ladies.

"No. Try again."

"I don't remember. Please send for papa. If I am ill he ought to come and see me. The other girls' fathers always come when they are ill."

"But your father was in Queensland, wasn't he, on the other side of the world?"

"Yes. I used to find the place on the terrestrial globe. It wasn't even marked there, it was such a new place. But the mistress showed me where to find it. It seemed so hard to think that we should be on opposite sides of this big world, papa and I."

"Farther asunder, now," thought the doctor, with a sigh.

"But papa came home, didn't he?" asked Flora with a puzzled air. "I remember getting his letter to say that he was coming. O, how happy I was that day! I could hardly contain myself for joy. Miss Mayduke gave us a half-holiday because I was so wild. I made all the other girls as wild as myself," she said. "Papa did come home; yes, I remember. Where is he? Why doesn't he come to me?" with a sudden dawning of recollection, an agony of nameless fear. "Why does he keep away from me?"

"Where he is there is no going to and fro," answered the doctor gravely.

"I remember you now," cried Flora. "You are Dr. Ollivant. It was you who told me papa would die. I hate you!"

This was Cuthbert Ollivant's reward for seven weeks' exemplary care and patience; for anxiety that had gnawed him to the core; for the sinking sickness of despair, the feverish alternations of doubt and hope.

"I hate you!" exclaimed Flora, and turned her face to the wall.

He stayed in the room a little longer, gave some fresh directions to the nurse, and then left without another word to the patient.

He had done what seemed to him best and wisest. He had

tried to bring the truth home to her; had practised no soothing deception. He left the reawakened mind to battle with its grief. Sense and reason were returning, and he would not darken the light of consciousness by any comforting delusion. Better for her to awaken to sense and sorrow together, than to enjoy a dim interlude of false hope, and to have all the pain to come.

Convalescence was slow and tedious. It was late in January when the clouds began to be lifted from the obscured brain. It was late in February before the patient was well enough to totter feebly down to the prim old-fashioned drawing-room, and sit, muffled in shawls, in the high-backed arm-chair drawn close to the fireplace. The weather outside those three tall windows was dark and bleak and stormy; and it seemed to Flora as if the outlook of her life was of the same dull cheerless gray. The monotonous moaning of the east wind at night sounded like the chorus of her life's tragedy—a wail for days and friends departed,

“Days that are over, dreams that are done.”

She was too weak to think much or deeply yet. Thus Providence tempered the wind for her. Her grief would hardly have been endurable had her mind been strong enough to grasp it. There was a vagueness about her sorrow still. It seemed a strange thing to begin life afresh in that unfamiliar house, where the business of existence went on as if mechanically—no bustle, no excitement, no confusion, no variety, every day so like the days that had gone before, that there were times when she hardly knew whether it was the beginning or end of a week. Strange to feel that she belonged somehow to Dr. Ollivant and his mother; that outside this house she had no part in life, no friends, no refuge; that but for them she would be as solitary in this busy crowded world as Selkirk on his barren isle in mid ocean.

She thought continually of the old house in Fitzroy-square; the dear old gloomy, cheerful, bright, dingy house—a house which in itself enclosed all the opposites of nature—a dwelling-place made up of incongruities. How gruesome the wide old staircase and hall had looked sometimes in the dusk of a winter afternoon when her father was out, Mrs. Gage and her subordinate buried somewhere in subterranean regions, and Flora seemed alone in the house! How gay and bright and homelike the drawing-rooms had looked later in the evening, when there were big fires roaring in both grates; candles burning on chimney-pieces, tables, and piano—candles in heterogeneous candlesticks; the piano open; her father smiling at her as he

reclined in his easy-chair; Walter joining his voice with hers in the joyous strains of "*La ci darem la mano*."

Sometimes she had a passionate longing to see those rooms again; a yearning so intense that only utter weakness restrained her from attempting to gratify it. Yet how vain, how foolish, how bitter it would have been! What would she find there but an empty house? They were gone; they who had given life, and warmth, and love to the dull old rooms; they who had made her world. She would find the dear old house cold and blank, dusty, dilapidated, with the dreary words "*To Let*" staring from the cobweb-wreathed windows; or worse, perhaps, find it occupied by strangers, brightened, garnished, made gay by happy people who had never known her dead father.

The thought of that house, and her perplexities as to its fate, haunted her sometimes in the dead of the night. Was there music in those rooms now, she wondered, and youth and happy laughter, as there had been last winter, only a year ago, when she and Walter had spent the cheerful December evenings together? She fancied she could hear a sound, as of distant music, distant laughter, sounding in that forsaken dwelling.

"Should I see papa's ghost, if I went there in the dusk?" she wondered; "if I thought that, I would go there. That shadow would have no terrors for me. Dear father, if I could see your blessed spirit, and know that you are happy, yet pity me, and look forward for the day of our reunion."

Here happily faith sustained her. She had no doubt of that blessed day when she and her father would meet, verily in the flesh, as the Apostles' Creed taught her, clasp hands once more, and live together in a holier, brighter world than this. She had no doubt, but she bemoaned her youth, and the long blank future, the weary earthly pilgrimage to be trodden before the golden gates of that unknown heaven would open to admit her.

At last she ventured to question Dr. Ollivant about the subject of so many thoughts.

"The house in Fitzroy-square is let to some one else, I suppose," she faltered, "and the old furniture that papa chose has been sold?"

"No, Flora, nothing has been touched. I would do nothing without your permission. All has been left just as it was when you lived there. When you are well enough to think about such things, it will be for you to decide what shall be done."

This touched her more than all his kindness hitherto.

"O, that was so good of you. I thank you for that with all my heart," she exclaimed. "I shall see the rooms just as they were when papa and I lived there. I think I should like to go

back to Fitzroy-square to live as soon as I am quite well," she added, after a thoughtful pause.

"What, Flora! live alone in that big house, which seemed like a barrack even in your dear father's time?"

"I should never feel quite alone there," she answered, dreamily; "I should fancy papa was with me."

"My dear love, that way madness lies," said the doctor earnestly. "We cannot live with the spirits of our dead. Life was meant for the living, the busy, the hopeful."

"I shall never hope again."

"Flora, have you any idea what pain you give me when you say these things? I think I have deserved something better from you."

"You mean that I ought to be grateful to you?" she said, looking at him thoughtfully with her great hollow eyes; "grateful to you for taking so much care of me when I was ill; for bringing me back to life—life which has not one joy or one hope for me. I suppose I might have died but for your care?"

"I doubt if less care would have saved you."

"And I am to be grateful to you for that? God meant me to die, perhaps—meant to take me to my dear father, and you thrust yourself between Him and his compassion."

"No, Flora; if God meant you to die, He would not have raised up so strong a love in my heart—love strong enough to save you when science might have failed."

She only answered with a sigh. She heard him speak of his love to-day with an almost stupid indifference. What did it matter who loved or hated her? The only love she had ever cared to win was lost to her.

Nothing could be better for a convalescent than the placid, orderly course of life in Wimpole-street. As Flora grew stronger the doctor did his utmost to amuse her: brought her books and magazines; told her of the busy outer world—that public life in which even a mourner may be interested—the life of the multitude; that march of civilization which seems so grand and swift a progress, but which, after all, may be only a noisy demonstrative manner of standing still—progress as deceptive as Penelope's needlework, perpetually doing and undoing. He taught her to take some small interest in politics; and when any subject of wide importance was discussed in the newspapers, he would explain it to her, and read her two or three leaders in journals of varying opinion. In a word, although he was too careful of her to resume his lessons in the classics and natural science yet awhile, he was continually educating her nevertheless, and she grew more and more womanly in his society, without altogether losing the old childish grace.

She must have been something less than a woman if she had not been grateful for so much love, as time slipped by and the keen edge of her anguish wore off a little. Mrs. Ollivant treated her with a gentle motherly tenderness, somewhat precise and measured, perhaps, but undeviating in its indulgent kindness. The very rooms—immutable hitherto from the days when the furniture was brought up from Long Sutton—were now brightened and garnished, and made more youthful of aspect, for Flora's sake.

The doctor sent home a pair of well-filled jardinières one day; on another a noble stereoscope, whose numerous slides afforded a miniature panorama of Europe. He chose a new grand piano in place of the antique cottage, with its high rose-coloured silk back and brazen ornamentation. He substituted a large sheepskin mat of purest white for the somewhat dingy hearthrug. He bought a couple of low easy-chairs from a Wigmore-street upholsterer, and sent the straight-backed arm-chairs from Long Sutton to the limbo of superannuated furniture. He rarely went his day's round without finding a bit of Dresden, or Wedgewood, or Palissy ware to bring home to Flora in the evening. If he could win the faintest, most shadowy little smile, his trouble was more than recompensed.

"I hardly know the room," Mrs. Ollivant said. "In my young days people usen't to turn their drawing-rooms into toyshops; but it looks bright and pretty enough, my dear, and if it pleases you and Cuthbert, I'm sure I ought to be satisfied. It's more your house than mine."

"O, Mrs. Ollivant, I am only a visitor."

"Nonsense, my love; it will be your house by-and-by. I look forward to that day as hopefully as Cuthbert does, and I'm pleased to see him make the house bright and pretty for your sake; though let him go where he will, he'll never get better cabinet-work than the furniture I brought from Long Sutton."

Thus, little by little, as her mind slowly awakened from its all-absorbing grief, Flora came to understand that in that house she was regarded as Cuthbert Ollivant's promised wife. No direct words of his had ever urged this fact upon her, but there were tendernesses and familiarities in his tone which augured a sense of right and power over her. He spoke of her and to her as something that was all his own. He consulted her about the plan of his life, admitted her into the secret of his hopes, tried even to interest her in his professional career.

Flora remembered her father's death-bed, that solemn joining of hands by the dying father, whose lightest wish should be sacred. And this had been no light wish, but a grave injunction. Could she wantonly disregard it?

Love for this kind and faithful friend she had none. Had he not entered her life as a prophet of evil? He had told her that her lover would be false, that her father would die in his prime, and both calamities had befallen her. Was it likely she could love him? She had been sorry for him that midsummer afternoon in Tadmor churchyard, when he had shown her the passionate depth of his nature. She was sorry for him now. Such devotion deserved her pity; but she deemed herself no nearer loving him than she had been then—when Walter was alive, and her life to come bloomed before her fairer than a rose-garden.

She looked down at her black dress, with a sense of protection in that sombre garment. Her father had not been dead six months yet. There could be no talk of marriage for a long time to come. So she closed her eyes to the future, and let life slide on quietly, like a sunless river, not bright, yet not altogether gloomy; a tranquil current drifting to an unknown sea.

From the time that Dr. Ollivant told her the house in Fitzroy-square was undisturbed her longing to see it intensified. It would look just the same as in the old happy days, never to be lived again—days that had no more to do with her life now than the days of any dead woman who had ever lived and been happy thousands of years ago. It would be like going back to the old life just for a moment, to see the old rooms that had witnessed her joy.

"How happy I was then!" she said; "there seemed nothing but delight in the world. I never thought of the miseries of others. My life ran on like a melody. Perhaps it is for my selfish heedlessness that I am being punished now."

The first time that she went out for a drive in the doctor's comfortable brougham, one sunny March afternoon, she urged him to take her to Fitzroy-square.

"My dear Flora, you are not strong enough for that visit yet."

"Indeed I am, if I am strong enough to go anywhere. You don't know how I have longed to see the old house. And it is so near."

"It is not the distance I am afraid of, but the painful emotions the place may occasion."

"They will not do me so much harm as the disappointment. I made up my mind that you would take me there as soon as I was well enough to go out."

"Be reasonable, my dear girl. Let me drive you round the Park."

"I hate the Park."

"Very well, Flora, I rely on your fortitude," said the doctor, and gave the order to the coachman.

A brief drive along Wigmore-street, past the Middlesex Hospital, down Charlotte-street, and they were in the unfashionable old square, with its spacious stone-fronted houses and deserted look.

"There is our house!" cried Flora eagerly, with almost a joyous tone. It was so hard, just at that moment, to remember that the fond father who had chosen and furnished that house would never cross its threshold again.

The old housekeeper, now an idle care-taker, opened the door. How the sight of her recalled to Flora the bright holiday life, the playing at housekeeping, and the girlish pleasure it had afforded her: ordering the dinners, with a charming assumption of wisdom, and no wider experience than Miss Mayduke's somewhat limited bill of fare to fall back upon: paying the weekly bills with bright golden sovereigns brought home new from papa's bank, where they seemed to have a fresh baking every day, as careless of the amounts as if the sovereigns had been counters!

Mrs. Gage expressed herself struck all of a heap by the unlooked-for advent of her dear young lady, and protested that she had taken the utmost care of everything—which care, from the prevalence of dust and cobwebs, seemed to have been of a passive rather than an active order—and led the way up the wide forlorn old staircase, sighing plaintively.

O, how sad the rooms looked! how every object spoke of the dead! Flora flung herself into Mark's favourite arm-chair, and kissed the cushion on which his head had rested, and wept as she had never wept since his death,—a rain of tears—tears which relieved the dull pain at her heart. To touch those things he had touched seemed to bring her nearer to him.

"Let me have this dear old chair in Wimpole-street," she said to Dr. Ollivant, when her tears were dried, "and his desk and books, and a few things that he was fondest of—my own old piano which he bought. You can do what you like with the rest."

"You have only to select the things you wish to have, Flora. Your wishes are my law."

"You are too good," she said; and then in a lower voice, "If I could only be more grateful!"

They went through the house, into every room—Flora's own bedchamber, with its girlish adornments—photographs, brackets, little bits of trumpery modern china, plaster copies of famous classic busts, hanging book-shelves bedecked with blue ribbons,—odds and ends which would not have realized a five-pound note at an auction, but which, for the doctor's eye, had a pathetic grace. He would not have parted with them for a year's income.

"We will have all these things taken to Wimpole-street," he

said; "and you shall furnish the little dressing-room with them, in memory of your first home."

He made a list of the things that were to be kept; while Flora was looking about her, and sighing over the relics of happiest days. Once he saw her stand at a window, looking out for a few minutes, and then turn away with a troubled sigh. He was quick to understand that she had been thinking of her lost lover, and the days when she had watched for his passing by. He let her drink her full of this bitter-sweet cup of sorrowful memories. He attempted no vain consolation, spoke no word, but let her wander as she listed in and out of the once familiar rooms, which had so strange an aspect to-day, as if they had been shut up for a quarter of a century.

"How old I feel!"

That was Flora's only remark as the carriage drove away towards a brighter end of the town.

The furniture was brought from Fitzroy-square next day, and Flora was allowed to arrange it according to her own pleasure, assisted by the doctor and the doctor's factotum, but not advised or interfered with by any one. She made the dressing-room adjoining her own orderly bedchamber a kind of temple, in which she might worship her father's memory, and brood upon sad thoughts of the past. Here she placed the sacred arm-chair, the desk at which Mark Chamney had written his brief business letters, the few books that he had collected in his active, unstudious life, old favourites all, read and re-read among the Australian sheep-walks: the *Vicar of Wakefield*, Pope's *Essay on Man*, *Shakespeare*, thumbred and dilapidated, *Kenilworth*, *Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy*, *Pelham*, *Pickwick*. She hung up her bookshelves, but discarded the blue ribbons, and a good deal of the childish trumpery which had once delighted her, reserving only those things which were her father's gifts. Here, too, she placed her piano and well-filled music-stand; and here, in the gray March twilight, faintly sang some of the old pathetic airs which her father had loved. It seemed to her that the arrangement of this room, in some manner, set a seal upon her life. The house in Wimpole-street was henceforward what it had never been before—her home. Whatever her future fate might be, she must needs submit to live here for years to come; Mrs. Ollivant and her son had been so good to her, and she owed them a debt of gratitude which she must work out in years of bondage. She began to feel more like Mrs. Ollivant's adopted daughter, and grew daily more attached to the kind quiet lady. If she could have for ever avoided that awful question of marriage, thrust from her mind the memory of her father's dying request, she would have been tolerably content with her

new life. It was as good a life as she could lead without her father or the lover of her girlish choice.

As she grew stronger in mind and body she went back to her study of the classics, and became once more Dr. Ollivant's attentive, intelligent pupil. Her old love of music reasserted itself, and she sang and played nightly to her two quiet companions; played dreamy waltzes and nocturnes, while the doctor read; and amused herself for many an hour in the day with her piano in the little nest up-stairs, where there were always fresh flowers and new books supplied by the thoughtful doctor.

"Flora," Dr. Ollivant said to her one evening, when they were sitting in the twilight after dinner—it was April now, and the lengthening evenings suggested thoughts of green lanes where primroses bloomed under the budding hedgerows—"Flora, do you know that you are a very rich woman? I have never cared to talk to you about business matters, but it is only right you should know that you have a considerable fortune."

"I knew papa was well off," she answered; "but I have never thought of money since his death. I used to be fond of spending it when it was all his money; I hate to think that death has made it mine."

"Still you ought to know that your father left you sixty-four thousand pounds. He had increased his capital by the profits from his shares in three of Mr. Maravilla's ships. I have left fourteen thousand in the ships, and transferred the rest to Consols. There was some slight loss incurred in the transfer; but as your guardian I considered it best that the bulk of your money should be in the highest securities of the land. Your income from these two sources is upwards of two thousand a year; so, you see, you are entitled to gratify any caprice or fancy that you may have. It is quite possible that your life in this house may be far different from the life you might choose for yourself. My mother and I lead rather a monotonous existence, and it is hardly fair to tie you down to a life in which there is so little pleasure or variety. You might wish to travel, to see the world, to win new friends, to make a circle for yourself. You are entitled to any pleasure you may desire, and have ample means for the indulgence of every inclination, for I am sure your wishes would never be unreasonable."

"Pray don't talk like that," said Flora; "how could I travel without papa? What pleasure should I feel in anything now he is gone?"

She remembered how she and Walter had planned their honeymoon in the garden at Branscomb; the garden-like Grecian isles, the blue skies, the sunlit smiling sea which the

painter had talked about. And yet all that time he had been false to her, and was but yielding weakly to her father's wish, and at heart preferred another woman.

"If I had married him and discovered that afterwards!" she thought. And, compared with such depth of misery, Walter's untimely fate appeared a merciful dispensation.

"My dear child," said the doctor in his tender protecting tone, "do you think that I wish you to lead any other life than this? It is my happiness to see you here, my mother's too. Our house has seemed a different place since you came to us—so much more like a home. Has it not, mother?"

"Yes, indeed it has, Cuthbert; though wherever you are is a home to me," answered Mrs. Ollivant fondly. "But dear as you are to me, I should hardly know how to get on without my adopted daughter," she added, caressing the soft brown hair which lay loose upon her knee as Flora sat on a stool at her feet, leaning lovingly against her.

"I am not likely to leave you, mamma," said Flora; she had begun to call Mrs. Ollivant thus of late. "It is very good of Dr. Ollivant to take care of my money, but I don't suppose I shall ever spend much of it, unless he can teach me how to do good with it."

The doctor felt easier after this brief explanation. That fortune of Flora's had been and must still remain more or less of a stumbling-block in his way. There were doubtless people who would say he had set a trap for the young heiress, drawn her into an engagement while her mind, overpowered by grief, was incapable of resisting his influence. But for the world's opinion he cared very little, so long as he set himself right with Flora herself.

"I will press no claim upon her," he thought, "I will take no base advantage of her father's dying words. Her own heart shall be the umpire. If, with so much in my favour, I cannot win her love, I will be content to lose her altogether."

Before the primroses had done blooming, the doctor sent Mrs. Ollivant and Flora down to Hastings, promising to spend his Sundays, or what in the north of England people call "the week-end," with them. He despatched his man beforehand to find a suitable lodging, and all things were made smooth for the travellers. Flora felt a curious pang of regret as Cuthbert Ollivant bade her good-bye at the railway station. "I shall miss my Latin lessons," she said gently.

"Does that mean you will miss me?" he asked.

"Well, I suppose it must be one and the same thing," she answered with a faint blush.

Thus they parted, and she felt sorry to part from him; as

if life lost some element of force and intellectuality, losing him.

So the first year of her mourning passed away tranquilly; not without some simple pleasures. And looking back upon that quiet interval, Flora was fain to confess that life had not been altogether unhappy. She had lived in an atmosphere of love; affection which she had received passively, or even unwillingly at first, but which now made the faint sunshine of her days.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Lass mich schweigen! lass mich dich halten. Lass mich dir in die Augen sehen; alles darin finden, Trost und Hoffnung, und Freude und Kummer."

THE year was gone, and the heavy crape dresses cast aside. Flora still wore mourning, but the mourning was of a less gloomy order. She wore silk instead of stuff, and white lace and muslin relieved the blackness of her raiment. She went with the doctor and Mrs. Ollivant to an occasional concert; and that simple lady listened patiently to the masterpieces of classical composers, without having the faintest appreciation of their merits. Dr. Ollivant took his ward to picture galleries, and developed her old love of art. The taste, so long subjugated by grief, was reawakened; but there was always a lurking pain. It hurt her to see the successes of rising young artists, remembering him whose promise death had blighted.

In all things that he did, Flora's well-being was the doctor's paramount consideration. He brought pleasant people to his house; men of professional standing, and their wives. He sought to win friends for her, and the gentle charm of her manner endeared her to the people he brought about her, almost in spite of herself. To know her was to love her.

To Cuthbert Ollivant's small circle of intimates Flora was known only as his ward. Not a hint had he ever given to his closest friend—and his friendships were not many—of his own hopes or Mark Chamney's dying injunctions. The foreseeing remarked that Dr. Ollivant was too young a man to have such

a pretty ward with impunity, and that his guardianship must end in a marriage, or in trouble of mind for the guardian. He had been careful to hold himself in check before the world; but a love which was the ruling idea of his life was not easy to hide. Men were deceived by his calm and even manner, but the women found him out.

"My dear, I tell you he loves her to distraction," said Mrs. Bayne to Dr. Bayne; and as her own marriage had been a love match, with some touch of romance in its history, the lady may have been a fair judge of such matters.

For Flora's sake Dr. Ollivant cultivated society more than he had ever done in his life; sacrificed precious hours of study to evening parties, more or less inane; gave frequent dinners, to the impoverishment of his income, the doctor's friends belonging to a class who must be fed sumptuously if fed at all. Poor Mrs. Ollivant sighed as she conned the confectioner's bill, and remembered the pastoral tea and supper parties at Long Sutton, when a pair of fowls at top, and a tongue at bottom, duly supported by a pigeon pie and a lobster salad, a dish or two of tartlets, a bowl of cream and a junket, had constituted the most elaborate supper to which Long Sutton epicureanism had ever aspired.

Cuthbert Ollivant wished his ward to see the world, to be admired, to be sought even, before he put forward his claim. With a curious self-abnegation, he, who had been so jealous of Walter Leyburne, took her among younger and more agreeable men than himself, and let her see the contrast between the scholar and slave of science, and the gay young idlers of society; men who seemed to have nothing to do but waltz perfectly and wear exotics in their button-holes.

Flora waltzed with these foplings; but finding not one among them to remind her of Walter Leyburne, suffered their fascinations scatheless, and thought all the better of Dr. Ollivant for the contrast between him and these butterflies. Hitherto she had compared him only with Walter; henceforward she compared him with the mass of mankind, and her estimate of him rose wondrously. So far, therefore, a policy which at first sight might have seemed suicidal had proved the happiest stroke of art.

The second winter after Mark Chamney's death was therefore varied by the pleasures of society. The light-hearted schoolgirl had developed into a thoughtful woman, self-contained, self-possessed, accomplished, well-informed. Flora's education had made rapid progress during that year of tranquil seclusion. There were few subjects of which she could not talk, and talk well, yet without a shade of pedantry. Enough of the old girlishness, the old spontaneity remained to make her charming even to the frivolous.

Spring came again, and this time awakening Nature found an answering joyfulness in Flora's mind. Last year, the very sunshine had been painful to her, the scent of the flowers had sharpened her grief for the lost, by sad association. All that was brightest on earth had reminded her most keenly of the dead. This year she could think of the past with a gentle subdued sorrow; memory's pangs were still sharp, but much briefer than of old.

Spring in Wimpole-street, where primroses only grew in balcony boxes, was not to be thought of; so Mrs. Ollivant and Flora went down into Berkshire for a fortnight, just to see the April flowers in their glory, and the first tender green of the horse-chestnuts' newly unfolded fans. They went to a quiet little village called Farley Royal, a rural out-of-the-way nook between Windsor and Beaconsfield, and the doctor promised to run down occasionally, after his wont.

Here they lived a simple rustic life. Mrs. Ollivant devoted her mind to the fabrication of a crochet antimacassar; Flora wore a gray gingham gown and a straw hat, and rested from the pleasures of society. She read to her adopted mother, painted a good deal—she had taken lessons from an old Frenchman during the winter, and improved considerably—in the open air, wandering in the woods at her own will. There were days when Mrs. Ollivant did not feel herself quite strong enough for these rambles, but preferred to sit alone in the old-fashioned parlour, writing a long letter to her son, or working laboriously at the antimacassar. Flora would have stayed at home to keep her company, but this the elder lady declined.

"You are so fond of sketching from Nature, my love. Why should you deprive yourself of the pleasure? You did not come here to keep me company, but to get health and strength for yourself."

Thus, after some affectionate remonstrances, it had been agreed that Flora should roam about as she listed, sketch-book in hand, during the bright spring mornings. In the afternoon she drove Mrs. Ollivant about the pretty neighbourhood in a comfortable basket carriage, drawn by the soberest-minded and most reliable of ponies.

It was the first of May, a Saturday, and the finest morning they had had yet; a typical first of May, upon which one could easily fancy Scottish damsels tripping to St. Anthony's chapel at the foot of grassy Arthur's Seat, to gather May dew for their complexions. Flora set off for her favourite bit of woodland scenery directly after an eight o'clock breakfast. She wanted to paint a little bit of the greenwood, a rough rustic bridge over a brook which late rains had widened just at this

spot to a shallow pool of clearest water. All Nature's colours were at their brightest just now, with a soft freshness and clearness that would be burnt out of them by-and-by with the sultry heat of summer—bluest hyacinths, purplest violets yellowest primroses, silver-white anemones—all nature clad in fresh unfaded robes, as in life's morning.

Flora spread her shawl at the foot of a pollarded beech, whose massive trunk the sunshine flecked with silver here and there, filtering downward through the over-arching chestnut boughs, for the wood here was thickest, and the young fan-shaped leaves made a green canopy. She settled her sketching-block on her knee, mixed her colours in the small tin box, and set to work with a keen delight in the labour, though Winsor and Newton's brightest tints seemed dull and muddy compared with that tender luminous colour of lavish Nature's painting. Colour she could reproduce faithfully enough, only light was wanting.

She worked for an hour, lost in the artistic pleasure of her work, hardly knowing whether she was doing well or ill, when a voice behind her said quietly,—

"Monsieur St. Armand's lessons have not been thrown away, I perceive. He may congratulate himself upon having so industrious a pupil."

"Dr. Ollivant!" she cried, startled, but hardly surprised. He had been expected that evening.

He was standing there with his hat off, breathing quickly, as if from rapid walking, looking brighter than he was wont to look, less the dryasdust, hard-working doctor than usual. There was a glow upon his cheek, a light in his eye that made him look younger than he looked in Wimpole-street.

"Mamma didn't expect you till supper-time," said Flora; "we live in quite a primitive style here, you know—dinner at two, and a tea-supper at eight."

"I changed my mind and started directly after breakfast. For once in my life I allowed myself to be influenced by the weather. There was sunshine enough even in my consulting-room to set me longing to be in the woods or the meadows with you; so I flung discretion to the winds, and drove straight off to Paddington."

"How nice of you!" she said, putting up her brushes in the little paint-box. "Let us go home to mamma and give her a long drive. She will be so delighted to have you."

"No, Flora, I must have my morning with you; I came down early on purpose for that. My mother shall have her drive later, but you and I must spend this one May morning together; you and I, and never a third. I only called at the

house to ascertain which direction you had taken, and then came in search of you."

"You must do as you please," said Flora, a little embarrassed, and with a painful recollection of a certain scene in Tadmor churchyard.

"I know but one pleasure in the world, one happiness, one end and aim of all my days: to be with you. Flora, I have been very patient; is it too soon to speak? Am I no more to you now than I was that day in Devonshire, when I let passion get the upper hand of prudence? Have I done nothing to prove my truth since then; nothing to show myself worthy of your love?"

"You have been more than good to me," she answered gently, deeply moved; "too good; so much kinder than I deserve. It would be strange if I were not grateful and attached to you. Except mamma, you are the only friend I have upon earth. You have outlived my narrow world."

There was bitterness in that last sentence, the pain of an inextinguishable regret.

"Can you give me nothing more than gratitude, Flora? Give me but a little of the love I have given you, and must give you to the end of my life, and I am content. O, my dearest, I ask so little from you; hardly more than I should claim from a flower or a bird which I might choose to be the ornament of my life. Love me a little; or at worst tolerate me; suffer my love. Let me have you to cherish, and think for, and care for, and toil for. I will work for you, love; labour to make my name famous for your sake. Grant me only as little as that, Flora; it is not much to ask."

Deeper humility never proved the wondrous depth of love. Flora trembled at the thought of so infinite a passion, so great a treasure unregarded; trembled, and with a sigh remembered Walter's light love and careless wooing. And she would have given half her life for such love as this from him.

"It is too little for you to ask," she said timidly; "yet I can give no more. Papa wished me to be your wife. For his sake——"

"No, Flora, for my sake, not for his. As an almsgiving to a beggar, if you like; but out of pure pity for me, and for me alone. I will not have you if you would marry me for your father's sake. I would have taken any gift from his hand but that; not that. Your love, your compassion, your gratitude, whatever it pleases you to call it, must be freely given; of yourself, from yourself."

There was some touch of pride here, which contrasted curiously with his humility just now.

"I have let you see the world, Flora. You have had admirers enough to show you what kind of rivals would dispute the prize with me. I daresay I seem a dryasdust wooer compared with those young men."

"There is not one of them worthy to be compared with you," she answered earnestly. "If—if I had never cared for any one else——"

His face darkened.

"Why speak of the dead?" he asked. "If I were Destiny and could give your lover back to you, do you suppose I would not have done it long ago, rather than be tortured by the sight of your grief? I cannot give him back, Flora. I cannot lay down my hopes again as I laid them down the day I heard of your engagement, and schooled myself to submit to the irrevocable. You would have heard no more of my love if Walter Leyburne had lived. But among the many glad young lives that are taken every year, Fate chose to take his; are you to mourn for him all your days, change all youth's natural joys to sorrow because he is gone?"

"I have left off mourning for him, you see," she answered, "for I seem to be tolerably happy. I wonder at myself sometimes, that I can be happy without papa or him. And yet I know that he never gave me love for love."

"You know that?"

"Yes. I have found out a secret about him, since his death."

"What secret?" asked the doctor breathlessly.

"I cannot tell you that. I would rather never mention his name again. I gave him my love foolishly, childishly, unsought. It is so bitter to remember that."

"Forget it, then, Flora, and reward a love which your coldness could never lessen, your indifference has never checked; measureless love, which would survive if disease effaced your beauty, if madness obscured your mind; love which would cling to you and follow you through the worst changes that Fate could bring. Give me all I pray for, dearest—a tithe."

He was kneeling on the turf at her feet, his hands clasping hers, his eyes raised to her downcast face, half in supplication, half in scrutiny.

"I will give you all I can—fidelity and obedience."

He drew the blushing face down to him, and kissed the tremulous lips, his first kiss of love.

"My beloved," he said softly, "I would rather have fidelity from you than any other woman's fondest love. And if I cannot make you care for me, and if I cannot make you love me fondly before our days are done, love is something less than a god."

Flora felt a strange sense of rest and peacefulness after the ratification of that betrothal which, to her mind, had been made at her father's death-bed. She had never thought it possible to repudiate Cuthbert Ollivant's claim. Her dying father had given her to him. That bondage was sacred. She had shrunk from the thought of the day when Dr. Ollivant should claim his due; but now that the claim had been made she was content, nay, she felt more at peace than she had felt since Mark Chamney's death. Henceforward her lot was fixed; the quiet house in Wimpole-street her only home, the orderly eventless life to go on for all the years to come, death alone ending it.

There was some happiness, after all, in being so entirely beloved, and that by a man whom she was proud to confess her superior. Society had told her a good deal about Dr. Ollivant of late, and his praises had sounded sweet in her ear. They were still more welcome to her after her betrothal, for they reminded her what reason she had to be proud of her lover. She was proud of him. If she denied him love, she gave him reverence.

Never was there so submissive a mistress. She obeyed her lover in all things, consulted his wishes, studied his lightest inclinations, laboured to improve herself daily in some small measure, so that she might become less unworthy of such measureless devotion. They were the most chivalrous of lovers, and knew nothing of those pretty little quarrels, and small contests for power, which mingle their agreeable acidity with the honey of some courtships. Mrs. Ollivant basked in the sunshine of her son's happiness, and thought that Heaven had made this girl for his sake.

"Let it be soon, dearest," said Cuthbert, one evening when Flora had come down to his consulting-room for a book; and there in that sober and somewhat gruesome chamber, where many a man had heard his death-warrant, the lovers stood side by side in the summer dusk, Flora reaching upward for the volume she wanted, the doctor's arm put gently round her as he tried to draw her towards him.

"Never mind Carlyle's *Revolution* just now, darling. I'll find the volume presently. I want you to answer me that one question. When are we to be married? It is nearly six months since you gave me your promise. You cannot say that I have been an impatient lover."

"You know I am always ready to do what you wish," replied Flora meekly.

"My Griselda! Let it be this day month, then—just in time for me to show you Italy. November is a delightful month in

Rome. We will escape London fogs; and—well, for one of us, at least, earth will be paradise.”

“I should like to see Rome,” said Flora, with a subdued pleasure, not the girlish rapture she had felt when she thought of making her pilgrimage to that famous city with Walter Leyburne for her companion. “But isn’t a month a very short time?”

“No, love, not when I have waited so long already. I shouldn’t have been so patient perhaps, only I wished you to get used to the idea of our union, to be quite certain it would be tolerable to you. You haven’t repented, have you, Flora, and you don’t want to recall the promise you gave me by that old pollard beech near Farley Royal?”

“No, no,” she said eagerly; and then with infinite shyness, “I like you better now than I did then.”

“My treasure!” he murmured, folding her in his arms with fondest, proudest sense of ownership. “If love deserves return, I have more right to be so blessed, not otherwise. My own one, if you knew how happy you make me by one little word like that. Like me, sweet, and liking shall blossom into love, by-and-by. I can afford to be patient, having won you.”

The date of their marriage was settled between them then and there. It was to be as Cuthbert liked, and as mamma liked, Flora said. Cuthbert told her that he and his mother were of one mind, and that the wedding-day could not come too soon. They were still standing by the bookshelves, discussing this question, when the man-of-all-work announced “a person” to see Dr. Ollivant.

There is always something uncomfortable, something doubtful, if not mysterious, in that announcement of “a person.” The vagueness of the description has something awe-inspiring. The person may be anything, from the King of Terrors himself, bony of aspect and armed with his deadly insignia, down to the tax-gatherer. That word “person” covers all possibilities.

“What does he want with me?” the doctor asked, with some slight irritation. “Is it a patient?”

“I think not, sir. I asked if he wanted to see you professionally, and he said it was on particular business.”

“Where is he?”

“In the hall, sir.”

“Then you had better keep your eye upon the coats and umbrellas. There’s your book, Flora,” said Dr. Ollivant, selecting a volume in russet morocco; “I’ll come up-stairs directly I’ve done with this person.”

He went out of the room with Flora, and watched the little figure ascending the stairs till it was beyond his ken, before

he turned to the outer hall where the person awaited his pleasure.

There stood the person, a bulky broad-shouldered figure in the uncertain light. Dr. Ollivant went close up to him.

It was Jarred Gurner.

"What, is it you, my man? I thought I'd done with you."

"So I thought," replied the intruder, in a tone that was half sulky, half apologetic; "but the world has been hard upon me and I'm obliged to look you up again."

"Come in here, sir," said the doctor sternly, opening the dining-room door as he spoke, "and let us make an end of this business."

"I beg your pardon, doctor, I don't see how you can do that without making a clean breast of it to Miss Chamney. And I don't suppose you've brought your mind to that."

The wedding-day came—very swiftly as it seemed to Flora—a clear calm day at the end of October, just such a day as that which saw Mark Chamney's death, two years ago.

It was the quietest possible wedding, not at all like a Wimpole-street wedding, as the nursemaids and gossips of the neighbourhood remarked to one another. A physician out of Cavendish-square—the square, as Wimpoleites called it—and Cuthbert's oldest professional friend, gave the bride away; his daughter, a fair-faced girl of seventeen, was the only bridesmaid. There were no guests but these two: for the doctor had his own peculiar ideas about this ceremonial of marriage, and deemed that so solemn a cast of Fate's die should hardly be made amidst a smiling, critical, or indifferent crowd.

"Had I made myself more friends—real heart-friends—I would bring them round you to-day, Flora," he said on that fateful morning; "but I have been too busy for friendship, and I don't care to make my wedding-day a holiday for my acquaintance."

So after a quiet wedding, and a cosy little banquet at a round table decorated with white exotics, the doctor and his bride drove off to the railway station, on their way to Dover, and Mrs. Ollivant sighed to think how dreary the house would seem for the next month or so without them.

There had been one uninvited spectator at that quiet wedding, in the person of Mr. Jarred Gurner, not usually given to attend such ceremonials; once in a lifetime, according to his own statement, having been too much for him. But this marriage he beheld from behind the covert of a clustered column with considerable satisfaction.

"I think I've got him ever so much tighter now," he said within himself. "If the sight of me has been poison all along, it will be double-distilled poison in future. If he has shelled out pretty freely in the past, he'll have to shell out handsomer still by-and-by."

Arrie Badara.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Forgive, if somehow I forget,
 In woe to come, the present bliss;
 As frightened Proserpine let fall
 Her flowers at the sight of Dis:
 E'en so the dark and bright will kiss—
 The sunniest things throw sternest shade,
 And there is e'en a happiness
 That makes the heart afraid!"

DR. OLLIVANT brought his young wife home early in December, to all appearances as bright and happy a bride as a man could desire to give gladness to his days. The Wimpole-street house had been swept and garnished to do her honour, the fond mother taking pride in the preparation of her son's home. There was hardly a trace of the Long Sutton primness left in any of the rooms, though some of the substantial old furniture remained. It would have cost Mrs. Ollivant too sharp a pang to part with all these cherished memorials of her peaceful wedded life; the tables and chiffoniers which her own industrious hands had polished and dusted in days gone by. There were flowers all about the room when Flora saw it after her journey, despite the wintry weather outside. A new carpet of more delicate hues and more artistic pattern replaced the Long Sutton Brussels; new curtains draped the windows—curtains of French cretonne, palest lavender and rose; the design copied from a tapestry that had clothed the walls of Marie Antoinette's boudoir.

"Why, it looks like a new house!" cried Flora, gazing round admiringly, when she had kissed her husband's mother ever so many times in the gladness of reunion.

"But I am here to remind you that it is only an old one," said Mrs. Ollivant; "until you grow tired of me."

"Tired of you, mamma! What should I do without you? It wouldn't be coming home at all if you were not here. We might as well go to an hotel at once; mightn't we, Cuthbert?"

"Yes, dearest," answered the doctor, looking tenderly down at the fair young face in its matronly bonnet. Flora had insisted on wearing a bonnet since her marriage; in order that she might look like a married woman, she said.

"And how did you like Rome?" asked Mrs. Ollivant, just as if she had been asking about Ramsgate, and could be answered in a sentence.

"O mamma!" exclaimed Flora, and rushed into a rapturous description of the great city, which lasted till Mrs. Ollivant grew uneasy about the dinner.

"Come upstairs and take off your things, my pet," she said in the middle of Flora's account of the Colosseum by moonlight. Mrs. Ollivant had a vague idea that she had heard something of it before, and she was impatient to display the glories of those upstairs rooms which had been refurnished for the young wife.

Here, in the best bedroom and adjoining dressing-room, the Long Sutton movables had been discarded altogether. The doctor had furnished the rooms after his own taste, by way of giving Flora a pleasant surprise on her return. The room on the third floor, where she kept her relics of the past, would still be hers. No profane hand had disturbed that. But these rooms he had beautified as a wedding-gift for his bride.

Dr. Ollivant's taste in upholstery leaned to an elegant simplicity. The furniture was of bright-looking light wood, the draperies pale blue silk, that innocent youthful blue of summer skies, which seemed Flora's appropriate colour, the tender hue of forget-me-nots blooming by some meadow-brook. The dressing-room was a nest of blue and white—so pretty that Flora gave a little breathless cry of rapture at sight of it.

"O mamma, how good you are to me!" she exclaimed. "Can I ever be grateful enough for so much love?"

"It was not I, my dear," answered Mrs. Ollivant; "I only superintended the alterations. Cuthbert chose everything—nothing could be too good or too pretty for you in his opinion."

The doctor was on the threshold watching his young wife's pleased surprise. She turned to him with a smile, yet almost moved to tears by this new evidence of his affection. "What can I do to prove my gratitude, Cuthbert?" she said.

"Be happy, my love. It is the only favour I ask of you."

"How can I be otherwise than happy, when you and mamma are so kind?"

She kissed them both in her simple innocent manner, like a child who bestows grateful kisses on the giver of her last new toy, and then began to examine her treasures in detail—the dressing-table, with its innumerable drawers and elaborate contrivances, which might have accommodated the machinery of a Poppæa's charms, or of her whose toilet her warrior husband compared to an arsenal; the dainty little davenport, with its blue velvet-covered desk and oxydised silver implements; the luxurious easy-chair; the jardinière filled with china-roses and lilies of the valley.

"My love, don't thank me for these trifles," remonstrated Cuthbert, after another little gush of gratitude. "Do you forget that you are an heiress, and entitled to have every caprice gratified?"

"But how nice of you to find out just what I should like the best! I never could go into an upholsterer's and choose the prettiest things in his shop and say, 'Send me home those.' It would seem the acme of selfishness. And, then, things I bought myself would never be so nice as gifts from you. How did you know I was so fond of blue and white?"

"Haven't I seen you wear them? It would be strange if I didn't know your favourite colours, love, when your tastes and inclinations are the most interesting study I have."

Thus began a wedded life which was like a pastoral poem in its simple happiness. On one side, the profoundest, strongest love which man's heart is capable of feeling; on the other side, a gentle affection which time ripened and strengthened. If a man could turn a key upon the chamber of memory, and say to himself, "I will unlock that door never again," Cuthbert Ollivant might have been supremely content; but even his vigorous mind failed in the endeavour to forget one particular scene in his life, and the thought of that summer day on the cliff near Branscomb rose before him like a ghost amidst his happiest hours.

Even that remorseful memory could not destroy his happiness; it only gave a feverish taste to joy—as of something that might be fleeting. The one fatal question would suggest itself, "What if she knew the truth?"

Or what if in some evil hour an enemy's version of facts were presented to her, and the real truth, as known to the all-seeing Judge, were withheld from her knowledge? Were she to learn half the truth from malicious lips, would she believe the whole truth if she heard it from his? Would she give him an instant's credence if she knew that he had deceived her all along, had known the history of her lover's death and kept it from her, caused that death, and smiled in her face, and pretended to console her?

"There are treasons that a woman cannot forgive," thought Dr. Ollivant, "and mine is one of them."

In everything that her did for her—every service he rendered, every fresh proof of his abounding love—he remembered that unforgiven, undiscovered wrong, and thought how she would have scorned his kindness and repudiated his gifts, if she had but known. And Fate hovered about his path always, in the person of Jarred Gurner; not an easy gentleman to manage, as Cuthbert Ollivant had already discovered.

Thus there was always a scorpion among the smiling blossoms of the doctor's Eden; and when Flora looked at him most kindly, thoughts of darkest possibilities would flit across the secret chambers of his brain and poison his delight.

Something in his manner made Flora suspect that he had secret cares, and one day she taxed him with hiding his troubles from her.

"I don't want to be a fair-weather wife, Cuthbert," she said to him one day, "or to be treated quite as a child, though it is very nice to be so petted by you and mamma. You have such a pained look sometimes, a look that darkens your face for a moment like a passing cloud. And I have heard you sigh in the midst of a smile. I know you have some anxiety which you fancy you ought to hide from me. That isn't kind of you, dear. I have a right to share your burdens."

"You lighten them all, my pet. As to trouble, a professional man must always have perplexities. I mustn't bring the shop into our home-life. My mother can tell you that I have no troubles of my own. Providence has been very good to me. I earn more money than we can spend. My name is rising in my profession. And I have the sweetest wife that Heaven ever bestowed upon an erring mortal."

"You mean to say that you are quite happy then, Cuthbert? And when I see that troubled look come over your face I may feel assured it is only some unselfish care for one of your patients that disturbs you?"

"Think what you like, love, except that I can be unhappy when I have you. Perhaps I may feel a little like Polycrates when he threw his ring into the sea, or Croesus when he bragged to Solon. There is such a thing as being too happy."

The doctor kept a closer guard upon himself after this, and let no cloud upon his countenance betray that hidden page of memory, the one fatal page at which the book *would* open.

Never was wife more indulged than Flora. Her existence was one bright holiday, spent among books and flowers and music, fenced in and surrounded by love. Of the actual burden of life she knew nothing. Mrs. Ollivant kept the house, and took the weight of all sordid cares upon her own patient shoulders. Flora was never plagued about servants or butcher's bills, or

perplexed about ordering of dinners. If she had lived in a fairy palace, where all the household work was performed by euchantment, she could not have been more free from household cares. And for once in a way that much-abused relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law resulted in perfect harmony. Mrs. Ollivant senior was not reduced to a nonentity in the home where she had been accustomed to rule, and Mrs. Ollivant junior did not consider herself ill-used because her mother-in-law kept the keys and gave her orders to the servants. Nor did the servants even complain that they had two mistresses, for all were agreed upon regarding Flora as a kind of ornamental addition to the household, its glory and its pride. The cook would come to the top of the kitchen staircase to peep at her when she was going to a party; the housemaids felt honoured when she permitted them to assist her in the arrangement of the flowers that filled jardinières and vases, and beautified every room with which Flora had anything to do. Arranging the flowers and seeing to the birds—the big cage of canaries was established in the back drawing-room window—made up the sum of young Mrs. Ollivant's household work.

The house in Wimpole-street was gayer this winter than it had been yet. Flora found it necessary to have an evening for her friends, a reception at which there was always good music and pleasant society, while Mrs. Ollivant senior took care that there should be unsurpassable tea and coffee, and a well-furnished buffet in the dining-room; a detail that helped to make the doctor's house popular. When the opera season began, Dr. Ollivant surprised his wife with the gift of a box on the pit tier of Covent Garden; small, but snug, and newly furnished for its new tenant. He asked her one day if she would not like to have a country house; and when she smiled and said "Yes, it would be rather nice," flung the title-deeds of a villa at Teddington, just above the lock, into her lap.

"You need not be mewed up in London always, my love, because I am too selfish to part from you," he said. "Teddington is near enough for me to come backwards and forwards every day, and you can go and stay there whenever you like; though I confess to feeling happier even down-stairs in my consulting-room when I know that you are here, and that I may see your bright face at any moment."

Furnishing the Teddington villa made a pleasing diversion from Hyde Park and the Italian Opera. This time Flora chose all the furniture, with occasional advice and assistance from her husband. Dr. Ollivant had bought the villa as a toy for his wife, and he wished her to have the largest possible amount of amusement out of it.

This was his only notion of atonement for that wrong the memory of which stung him like a serpent's tooth. That his wife should have every delight that the heart of a woman could desire—through him—be sheltered from every peril, relieved of every care—by him—so that if ever, with the knowledge of that deadly secret, she should come to hate him, she must even then, looking back at her present life, confess, "He was good to me, and some of my happiest days were spent with him."

Was Flora perfectly happy in her new life? If she had been asked that question, and had examined the woof of her existence ever so narrowly, she would have found it difficult to discover flaw or speck in the fabric. She looked back sometimes at the unforgotten girlish days and their dead joys; but it seemed to her that the Flora of that time was some one else, a girl she had known, beloved and happy—an image of her girlhood and thoughtless gladness which had faded out of the world long ago. Our lives are rarely homogeneous—the same in shape and substance and colour. They are rather particoloured patches of existence, joined together haphazard by Fate's rough workmanship. Looking back at that old life and its cloudless unquestioning delight, Flora still held it the best and happiest of her years. But she confessed to herself and to her husband that she was perfectly happy in the present, happy even when she sat alone in that rural churchyard on the north side of London, where her father slept the sweetest of all slumbers under the gray granite cross that marked his last abiding-place. "Papa wished us to be married," she said to her husband once; "that is my happiest thought when I go to look at his grave. I should be miserable if I had married any one he disliked."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"There shall be time for deeds, and soon enough,
Let that come when it may. And it may be
Deeds must be done shall shut and shrivel up
All quiet thoughts, and quite preclude repose
To the end of time. Upon this narrow strait
And promontory of our mortal life
We stand between what was, and is not yet."

ANY privileged person who had been admitted to the sacred interior of Mr. Gurner's home at this period could hardly have failed to perceive a change in that gentleman's manner of living—nay, even in the man himself—though here the difference, being more subtle, would naturally have been more difficult to define.

It was one of Jarred Gurner's idiosyncrasies, however, to keep himself very much to himself, so far as the domestic hearth was concerned, and to invite no one to his house, unless for some special reason, grounded upon self-interest. Few visitors had ever been allowed the privileges of intimate friendship which Jarred had accorded to Mr. Leyburne. He had his friends—chosen comrades and allies—but these he was in the habit of meeting at certain favourite taverns in the neighbourhood, where social intercourse was less restrained than it might have been in his own house, and the materials for conviviality were ready to hand.

"I don't want anybody spying about my place," Mr. Gurner was wont to remark; an observation not altogether complimentary to those boon companions whose jovial society gave wings to his evening hours.

Thus it happened that there were few to remark the change that had come over the spirit of Jarred Gurner's life inside the house in Voysey-street. The gossips outside took note of the fact that Mrs. Gurner bought more butcher's meat than in former years, and that Jarred came home tipsy oftener than of old, and worked less, as testified by the darkness of the first-floor-front windows on many an evening, instead of the cheerful glare of gas which had formerly testified to his industry.

Prosperity therefore of some kind, the Voysey-street gossips opined, had befallen the Gurners. It was not that the second-

hand wardrobe business was brisker than of old, for the tawdry garments hung even longer in the window and the shop-door bell jingled less frequently. Had the Gurners been blessed with a legacy—that windfall from the golden apple-trees of Fortune's Hesperidian garden? This question Voysey-street answered in the negative. A legacy was a blessing which old Mrs. Gurner would have bragged about. It would have been heard of at the chandler's, and been mentioned at the bar of the King's Head, where Mrs. Gurner went daily, and twice a day, for beer. No; there was something mysterious in the source of the Gurners' prosperity—something that Voysey-street could not get to the bottom of.

Could these inquisitive spirits have entered Jarred's domestic circle, they might have seen that his prosperity, whatever its source, was not an unalloyed blessing. He had ever been too apt to do his work in spurts, and to loaf away long gaps of time between his spasmodic bursts of industry. But now the spurts of application to business were rarer; his hand was less steady, his eye less keen when he did work. He neglected some of his best customers, both in the violin and picture trade; contrived to mislay a genuine Straduarus back which he was to have worked into the anatomy of a modern fiddle, mellowed by ten years' use in an orchestra, whereby that instrument would have become, according to the dealer's warrantry, a genuine Straduarus. He dawdled over a picture for a patron whom he would formerly have put himself out of the way to serve. In a word, Jarred Gurner, who had never trodden the fairest high-ways of life, was now on the road to ruin.

Mrs. Gurner perceived and lamented this decadence of her son, and bewailed it in many a rhapsody upon the obscure ways of Fate, poured into the ear of the desultory handmaiden who now came for three or four hours a day to help in the house-work, but rather as a semi-soliloquy, or involuntary flow of eloquence, like the philosophic outbursts of a Greek Chorus, than as a positive address to this damsel.

True that there was less difficulty about the water-rate than in days of yore, and that solid butcher's meat usurped the place of such cheaper delicacies as tripe, sausages, cowheel, and sheep's-head on Mrs. Gurner's board. Yet even this abundance brought no sense of satisfaction to that depressed householder's mind, for there was an air of insecurity about Jarred's life which troubled her more than the small perplexities of the past.

Perhaps Mrs. Gurner felt these anxieties all the more keenly for lack of the accustomed confidante of all her woes. Louisa was missing from that small household, and no one in Voysey-

street knew whither she had departed. A cab had been seen in the autumnal dawn, two years ago, by a few early risers—Voysey-street was not famous for early hours—a cab laden with a trunk and a bonnet-box, both new, standing at Mrs. Gurner's door; and Louisa had been seen to enter this cab, while Jarred, in shirt-sleeves and slippers, gave instructions to the cabman. Father and daughter had been seen to kiss affectionately and part; and from that day to this Voysey-street knew Louisa Gurner no more.

Mrs. Gurner, when questioned by her gossips, replied that Louisa was in a situation; whereupon some among her intimates remarked to each other that they hoped it was a situation which became a young woman to be in, but that they, for their parts, never liked mystery, and were inclined to think that old Mrs. Gurner wouldn't be quite so close about that dark-eyed granddaughter of hers if there were not something to hide from the searching light of public opinion.

The house, or that portion of it which the Gurners occupied, had a dreary air without Loo's quick step, and snatches of song, and brightly dark face flashing out from shadowy corners, as the girl moved briskly to and fro. The hireling who did Loo's work for half-a-crown a week and her dinner was afflicted with red hair and white eyelashes—was, moreover, slightly deaf, very slow in her movements, and subject to chronic influenza.

"It has been my lot in life to lose every creature that belonged to me," remarked Mrs. Gurner drearily, as she took her place at the dinner-table, after a somewhat exasperating morning's work with this girl.

Jarred, not long risen from his late-sought couch, unwashed, uncombed, and in his favourite negligé costume of shirt-sleeves and rusty black-velvet smoking cap, yawned and stretched as he listlessly contemplated the board, where a shoulder of mutton, roasted to a turn, and basted with heroic constancy by Mrs. Gurner's own hand, and a savoury mess of creamy-looking onion-sauce, invited his languid appetite.

"Well, you haven't lost me, anyhow, old lady," he said, between two yawns.

"I'm not so sure about that neither, Jarred," bemoaned the afflicted mother. "So far as sleeping under the same roof—at hours when respectable folks are up and about—and making believe to eat your meals here—for healthy appetite you have none—I'll allow that I haven't lost you. But you're no more the Jarred you used to be a few years ago than the hair under my false front is the colour it was when I was twenty years of age, and people called me the pretty Mrs. Gurner."

"Ah," said Jarred, with a careless sigh, "all things change. It's the first law of Nature.

'Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
Naught may endure but mutability.'

There's poetry for you, and sound sense into the bargain. You don't always find them together."

"I shouldn't complain of your changing, Jarred," whimpered Mrs. Gurner, looking despondently at the plate of meat which her son had just handed her, and helping herself to onion-sauce with an air of being above such trivial considerations as sauce to meat, "if I could get to the bottom of it, and knew what had brought it about. But I can't, and I don't. There was never a mother who had less of her son's confidence than I have. You spend our quarter's income before the quarter's half over; and then, when there isn't a penny in the house, and no resource open to you that I know of, you go out some evening, and come back after midnight very much the worse for liquor, and with your pocket full of sovereigns."

"Come, stop that howling," cried Jarred sternly, the slumbering tiger in that gentleman's breast fully awakened by this time. "I don't think you've any reason to complain. You live better than you've ever lived before, since I can remember. You haven't the tax-gatherer hounding you, or the landlord pressing for his rent, and you may shut up that tinpot shop of yours to-morrow if you like, and fold your arms and sit by the fire, and do nothing but nag—you'll never leave that off while there's a tongue in your head—for the rest of your days. What does it matter to you how I come by my money, or what I do with it, so long as I keep a good home over your head, and fill your inside with first-class victuals?"

"That's all very well, Jarred, but it isn't enough for a mother, a mother's anxieties are not so easily stifled. I want to know where your money comes from."

"Why, I work hard for some of it, don't I?" growled Mr. Gurner, pushing away his plate, after a vain attempt to do justice to that well-cooked shoulder.

"Precious little can you get by the work you do nowadays, Jarred."

"Well, you know where the most of our money comes from, at any rate."

"I know there's three hundred a year allowed us—and a very liberal allowance too, and one that might keep us with comfort, and in a more respectable neighbourhood than Voysey-street, if you weren't so reckless."

"Hang your respectable neighbourhoods! What do I wan

with a respectable neighbourhood, where there's nothing but psalm-singing old tabbies, who would be on the listen to catch me coming home late; a nest of gossips where a man can't take an extra glass, or stand at his door-step of an evening with a clay pipe in his mouth, without setting the whole street mag-ging about him? You may make you mind easy about that. If ever I leave Voysey-street it will be to go farther afield than you'll care to travel with me."

"I said so," sobbed Mrs. Gurner. "I felt it hanging over me. You'll be the next to desert me."

"I shall do it pretty quick, if you don't put a check upon that worrying tongue of yours," responded Jarred sharply. "There, I don't want a chapter in Lamentations—make the best of life, if you can. Most women in your place would think themselves uncommonly lucky after the stroke of good fortune that happened to us a year or two ago."

"It hasn't made my life any brighter, Jarred. It has robbed me of the only one of my kith and kin that I had to care for, except you, and it has made you and me farther apart than we used to be."

"That's what I call high-falutin," retorted Jarred. "If you expect that I am to sit at home and mope when I've a shilling to spare for a lively evening at the Hare and Hounds, or in the pit of a theatre where there's a good burlesque on, you expect too much. Human nature is human nature all the world over, and I'm too much of a man to be exempt from the weaknesses of mankind."

Mrs. Gurner sighed, and desisted from her complainings. She knew Jarred well enough to know that it was perilous to push him too far. Vegetable-dish covers and pewter pots flying, meteor-like, across the room were phenomena that had been beheld in Voysey-street.

The year wore on—the second year of Dr. Ollivant's wedded life, and Jarred Gurner seemed to grow daily less inclined for work. The dust lay thick upon the implements of his handicraft, the little jars and pots of oil and varnish and turpentine, the rags and sponges and flannels, accumulated in a heterogeneous heap upon a table in the first-floor front, which was at once Jarred's workshop, bed-chamber, and private sitting-room; the chamber where the Lamia picture had been painted. The canvas still stood there, its face turned to the wall, dusty, cob-web garnished, incomplete, forgotten—like that worst of all ruins, a wasted life.

As time went by, Jarred loved work less and pleasure more. He extended his circle of acquaintance out of doors, and the agreeable element of female society began to enter more freely

into his life. He speculated a little on the turf, in a public-house-parlour way, went to Hampton races with a jovial party, wore a white hat and blue necktie, dressed altogether more smartly than of old, and was often in want of money.

Three hundred a year—that fixed income which Mr. Gurner received from some unknown source—was not enough to support him in idleness and provide him with pleasure. It happens unfortunately for those gay spirits who derive all their gladness from external things, and whose mirth requires to be stimulated and sustained by perpetual amusement, that a day's pleasure generally costs more than a week's maintenance. The people who get rich are those who are content with the bread-and-cheese of life, and jog on at an even pace through an industrial career, to find themselves, too late perhaps for enjoyment, but not too late for pride, owners of large fortunes.

Jarred's amusements, though coarse, were costly, and the income which, administered by Mrs. Gurner, might have sufficed for comfort and gentility, in Jarred's hands was always running out, and leaving a blank and dismal interval to be supplied somehow.

These periods of dearth were especially irritating to Mr. Gurner's temper, a temper which had never known the curb, but had been allowed from Jarred's earliest boyhood as free and wild a career as that of an untamed mustang on the Texan prairie, and which had been rendered more violent of late by constant alcohol. Even Mrs. Gurner ceased her strophes and antistrophes of lamentation when Jarred was in one of his tempers; for his fits of passion lasted longer than of old, and were less amenable to the softening influence of hot suppers and gin-and-water. At such times she waited upon him with submissive attention, and was discreetly taciturn, knowing too well how light a breath would fan the smouldering fire into a destroying blaze.

It was early in June, and Voysey-street resounded with the cry of mackerel at three a shilling, when Mr. Gurner came home in the vesper hour, with gloomy aspect and strong symptoms of that moral hydrophobia to which he was subject. That early return to the domestic hearth was in itself an indication of empty pockets; for if Mr. Gurner had been provided with money he would most likely have betaken himself to the Hare and Hounds or to the King's Head at this hour, to solace himself with gin-and-water, "cold without," and discuss the odds about the runners in the Hampton races, which were now on, to-morrow being the great day.

Too well did Mrs. Gurner know the meaning of her son's clouded brow, as he swung open the parlour-door, walked past her without a word, and flung himself into his easy-chair by the

fireless grate. The matron was drinking tea, with the accompaniment of a penny twist, a pat of fresh butter fast reducing itself to oil, and a plate of shrimps too long alienated from their native deep.

"Upon my soul, the place isn't fit to live in, mother," cried Mr. Gurner, falling foul of these innocent crustaceans. "If you must have shrimps, you might as well have them fresh, and not poison my inside with such things as those."

"I must take them as they come to Voysey-street, Jarred," sighed Mrs. Gurner plaintively. "You can't expect the best of everything in such a neighbourhood as this, a neighbourhood that wasn't much to boast of when first we came to it, and has been going down ever since as fast as it can go. If you don't like the shrimps, you're not called upon to partake of them."

"But I am called upon to smell 'em. You'd better go and chuck 'em on the dustheap, if you don't want to drive me out of the place. It isn't much of a place for a man to come to at the best of times, without your turning it into a cholera den with unwholesome food."

Mrs. Gurner groaned feebly, took up the plate and went out into the back premises, to sacrifice the offending shellfish, which she cast upon the family altar of the dustheap with a regretful sigh.

"I'm sure I'm not likely to do anything calculated to drive you out of doors, Jarred," she said, "for I see little enough of you nowadays."

"You'd see less if it wasn't for my infernal luck," responded her dutiful son. "I ought to have been at Hampton to-day, instead of eating my heart out and kicking my heels up and down Fleet-street, waiting for the telegrams at the *Sporting News* office."

"I should have thought you'd seen enough of the consequences of horse-racing to keep clear of it, Jarred," moaned the despondent mother.

"I've seen the evil consequences of betting with other people's money, if that's what you mean," answered Mr. Gurner impatiently; "but I'm not going to join in the cant your parsons and such-like talk about the turf, because there are always a certain number of fools who make it their road to ruin. Does anybody fall foul of the Stock Exchange? Yet there are plenty of stockbrokers go to the bad every year of our lives. Or who stands up to abuse the cotton trade, or the coal trade, or the shipping interest? Yet there are failures enough in all of 'em. Of course I've seen men cleaned out on the turf; and I've seen omnibus cads and butcher's boys make half-a-million of money, and keep their houses in Hyde-park-gardens, through

horse-racing. Am I never to try to better myself because men have gone to the bad before me?"

"If horse-racing improved your temper, Jarred, or made you seem happier in your mind, why I might shut my eyes to the experience of the past, and reconcile myself to your enjoying life your own way," said Mrs. Gurner, venturing somewhat farther than wisdom would have counselled, beguiled by her son's manner, which was moody and despondent rather than violent.

"You'd have had nothing to say against horse-racing, I daresay, if Soapsuds had come in winner to-day, and I'd brought home a pocketful of money."

"I don't know about that, Jarred; remembering what I remember, I should fancy the sovereigns smelt of Van Diemen's Land."

"O Lord, can't you let bygones be bygones?" exclaimed Jarred, turning impatiently in his chair, and proceeding to conquer the lingering odours of fish with the fumes of cavendish and virginia. "That's the worst of old people, they remember too much, and are always preaching about the past. It would be a blessed thing for us if we could all have a dip in the waters of Lethe once a year, and come out fresh and lively."

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Gurner; "life would come easier if we could forget."

"By the way, mother," said Jarred, with a complete change of tone, and something of that agreeable manner which had been wont to distinguish him when things went well, "you haven't paid away that three-pound-ten I gave you for the rates the other day, have you?"

"The poor-rate collector has been and taken his money, Jarred, which the receipt is on the mantel-piece to confirm my words. The water has not called; but I expect him to-morrow morning."

"How much is the water-rate?"

"One pound three-and-six."

"Then you can let me have the money for a day or two, mother. I want to go a little way in the country to-morrow on business, and that'll just pay my expenses."

"It's your own to do what you please with, of course, Jarred," replied Mrs. Gurner reluctantly; "but I'm bound to tell you the water will be cut off to-morrow night if the rate isn't ready when the collector calls."

"O, nonsense! We've been precious regular lately."

"He has called twice already, Jarred."

"Very well; the next step will be a summons, I daresay. I'll pay the rate before the week's out. Hand us over the money, old lady."

Mrs. Gurner fumbled in the pocket of her gown, and then in an under pocket, with a slowness particularly exasperating to her son, who pulled at his pipe feverously while he watched her movements. At last, however, she withdrew her skinny hand from that receptacle in her quilted stuff petticoat, and produced some money screwed up in a piece of newspaper, which Jarred straightway pounced upon, counted at a glance, and dropped into his waistcoat-pocket.

"Thank you, mother. You needn't give yourself any uneasiness about the water-rate. If it comes to that," he added, seeing the gathering tears in his parent's faded eyes, "you can always turn on the waterworks yourself. There never was such an old party to snivel. Good-night."

"Are you going out again, Jarred?"

"Yes; I've an appointment with a fellow who's going to give me a Teniers to restore, round the corner. I shan't be above an hour."

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Gurner, as the door banged behind her departing son. "I know what Jarred's hours are. There's no use in getting him a savoury little bit of supper nowadays. He's never home in time to eat it, and his appetite wouldn't do credit to a sparrow."

Jarred had taken the money from his mother in order to provide for to-morrow's expenses at Hampton. He had set his heart on going to the races, for he had speculated somewhat heavily on certain events of the day, and he wanted to see his confidence rewarded, to be there on the spot to know the best or the worst as soon as it could be known. That waiting for tidings on the broiling flags of Fleet-street had sorely tried his impatient spirit.

Had he been wise, even in the pursuit of folly, Jarred Gurner would have asked his mother to give him the money next morning; for once furnished with ready cash, it was not within the compass of his nature to sit quietly at home. He would go round to the King's Head, take a glass of gin-and-water in the skittle-alley, which was a cooler place of resort than the parlour on such an evening as this, and watch the play. He was fully determined not to touch a ball, whatever form social temptation might take; and Jarred, broad-shouldered, long-armed, muscular, was a famous skittle-player. He had lost and won many a shilling at this game; but won oftener than he lost, and might have come off a winner in the long-run had he confined his risks to skittle-playing. It was the betting in the parlour that wrecked him.

He wended his way to his favourite hostelry, a house which looked so clean and cool and respectable on a summer evening, that

a wanderer from some distant sphere, beholding a tavern for the first time, might have supposed it the chosen home of innocence and peace. The shining pewter measures, the pewter counter, the gilded lettering of spirit casks, gleamed in the rosy beams of a setting sun. The spirit of tranquil enjoyment seemed to hover over the scene, as Jarred pushed open the swinging door of that inner temple, the sanctuary of the privileged, known as the order department, and passed thence by a side door into a shadowy sanded passage which led to the skittle-alley, ordering his refreshment of the attendant nymph at the bar as he went by.

The evening sports were in full swing; his chosen friends among the players and lookers-on—talk and laughter loud, the lights shining dimly through an atmosphere cloudy with tobacco. Jarred felt that he began to live again, and with him life meant unbridled inclinations, the pleasure of the hour, to be paid for in the future perhaps, and heavily. But these free souls seldom count the cost.

It was eight o'clock when Jarred joined the revellers in the skittle-alley. He left it at half-past ten, a sadder but not a wiser man, poorer to the extent of the sum reserved for the water-rate, reckless, angry with Fate and with his own fatuity, and with a somewhat unreasonable sense of resentment against Mrs. Gurner for having so weakly yielded up the money which he had demanded from her.

"If the old woman had only stuck to it till to-morrow morning, I might have had a jolly day at Hampton," he said to himself; "as it is I've very little chance of seeing the races, unless Jobury does the good-natured thing, and gives me a lift in his tax-cart."

Jobury was a sporting butcher, one of the boldest spirits in Mr. Gurner's circle, who plunged heavily, and was supposed to be in a fair way to attaining distinction on the turf. There was a vague tradition that Jobury had once had a fourth share in a famous three-year-old, and had just escaped greatness by losing the Derby.

Jarred strolled round to Jobury's abode, but found the gentleman had not yet placed himself under the shelter of his Penates, but was expected home to supper any time before midnight. Mrs. Jobury, a depressed and somewhat peevish-looking female, gave Jarred this information reluctantly, and having given it, slammed the street-door in his face, hardly affording him time to state his intention of favouring Mr. Jobury with a later call. There are wives whose ill-regulated minds cannot appreciate the glories of the turf.

Jarred muttered an imprecation upon his Eumenides, whom

he was wont to revile rather than to conciliate, and turned away from Mr. Jobury's threshold, scarcely knowing whither to betake himself. He paused at the street corner to light his pipe, and took a turning which brought him into Goodge-street. He walked down Charles-street and Mortimer-street, crossed Regent-street, and entered the aristocratic region of Cavendish-square. Once here, the inclination to push on to Wimple-street was too strong to be resisted. He had drunk just enough to make him reckless. True that he was pledged not to approach Dr. Ollivant's dwelling on pain of forfeiting all claim to occasional largesse from that gentleman. But Jarred cherished an inward conviction that, whatever the doctor might threaten, he, Jarred, possessed just that power to worry his victim which could not be denied—that, however the native manhood of the victim might rise up against him, ready to defy his capacity for working evil, the end would be subjection and subsidy.

This idea, strengthened and sustained by alcohol, fortified Mr. Gurner to-night, as he knocked a spirited double-knock at the doctor's door.

The factotum, who had seen him two or three times before, and regarded him with marked disfavour, looked at him dubiously.

"The family at home?"

"The ladies are at the villa at Teddington, sir. My master is in town; but I don't think he will see you at such a late hour as this."

"O yes, he will," said Jarred, with a swaggering air—he felt a very big man before this meek-voiced butler; "he'll see me."

"Yes," said a voice from the back of the hall, "I'll see you. Walk this way, if you please."

Dr. Ollivant had opened the door of his consulting-room, disturbed perhaps by Jarred's loud knock. He stood upon the threshold of that sacred chamber, waiting for his guest to pass in.

Jarred was slightly disconcerted by the promptitude of his reception. It would have suited his present temperament better to have had occasion to bluster a little before he obtained admittance.

That very quietude of the doctor's manner chilled him. He took off his hat hastily, and shifted the brim round with a somewhat nervous movement of his ungloved hands.

"I daresay you are rather surprised by the hour of my call, Dr. Ollivant?" he began.

"Not at all; one hardly expects a man of your stamp to be particular about hours. But I am very much surprised that you should come here at all."

"Why so?"

"Because by so doing you forfeit all claim upon my future consideration. I think I put that to you very clearly when last we met."

"O, come, I say, doctor," exclaimed Jarred, flinging himself into one of the substantial morocco-covered chairs—a chair so respectable of make and antecedents that it may well have resisted this degrading contact with an agonised creak—"come, I say, doctor," repeated Jarred, throwing his hat upon the table as if it had been a glove, "let's talk plain English while we're about it. There's nothing like sticking to plain English. What you call future consideration I call hush-money. That's English. Now, do you mean to say that because, impelled by the force of circumstances,—there was a thickness of utterance, a throatiness, as singers call it, in Jarred's long words that made him rather difficult to follow just here—"because I find myself at devilish low water, in a financial sense, and come here to you to ask a favour, as between man and man—I say, as between man and man," repeated Jarred, pleased with the phrase, "that you mean to turn rusty and say I'm never to get another blessed fiver out of you on account of holding my tongue about that little affair down at Branscomb?"

"I do mean most emphatically to say that you shall never more have a sixpence from me by way of hush-money; and that I despise myself for having been weak enough to let you make a criminal transaction out of an unhappy accident."

"Come, you've had the best of it so far. You got rid of a dangerous rival, and you got the lady you were sweet upon."

"I'll trouble you to keep my wife's name out of the business, and to reserve your speculations upon my affairs. I told you before my marriage that whatever money I gave you henceforth I would give in my own manner and at my own time; that I acknowledge no claim, and that any approach to persecution on your part would be met on my side by defiance. There may be men who would consent to hold their domestic peace on the sufferance of a scoundrel of your class for a lifetime; but I am not one of those men. It may be that you have the power to destroy my happiness; but you must be aware that in so doing you destroy your own chances of future advantage. I am willing to supply you with small sums of money from time to time, since no single amount in the present, however large, would secure you from future want or me from future annoyance. I am willing to do this, on the one condition that you will keep your distance, and assail me neither by letter nor by visit."

"And suppose I say that I will be bound by no such condition, that I will choose my own time, and be governed by my

own necessities, in applying to you for assistance? What would be your answer to that per-p-p-roper-sition, Dr. Ollivant?"

"A very brief and practical answer. I should give you in charge for attempting to extort money."

"And stand the racket, eh?"

"And abide the issue of anything you could say about me. Do you for one moment suppose—looking at my position and at yours—that the world would believe any unlikely story you might tell against me?"

"I'm not thinking of what the world would believe, Dr. Ollivant. I'm thinking of your wife: how my story would affect *her*. That's the consideration. She can't quite have forgotten the young man she kept company with. Come now, I don't want to be disagreeable, but business is business. I'm bound to attend Hampton races to-morrow, and I haven't a stiver to pay my fare down or to clear my engagements if things go against me. Give me a ten-pound note, and you shall hear no more of me for the next six months."

"You are very obliging; but I gave you my ultimatum when last you favoured me with a call. I will send you a post-office order for ten pounds on the twenty-ninth of next September, and will send you the same amount on every ensuing quarter-day; but I will not give you one shilling in this house, or in compliance with an insolent demand."

"I didn't come here to be insolent; I came here because I was in desperate want of money. Don't aggravate a man that's down on his luck, Dr. Ollivant. Unlucky men are reckless, and reckless men are dangerous. I'm unlucky, therefore I'm dangerous. There's a syllo—syllo—what's its name for you, doctor."

"You have had my answer."

"So be it," replied Jarred, drawing himself together with the stateliness of intoxication. "Remember my syllogism—what's its name. Ergo, I'm dangerous. Good-night."

He stalked to the door, like the Ghost in *Hamlet*, holding his hat as though it were that kingly phantom's truncheon.

"You've given me your ultimatum, I've given you my syllo—syl—lologism. Good-night," he murmured thickly; and so departed through the hall and out at the street-door, to the last preserving that air of Hamlet's father, the doctor watching him. Dr. Ollivant rang the bell sharply as the door closed on his visitor.

"Take care never again to admit that person," he said to the man-of-all-work.

"Yes, sir."

"He is a man I have assisted, and who has become importunate. Should he press for admittance, at any time you may give him in charge."

"Certainly, sir."

Dr. Ollivant went back to his consulting-room—that vault-like chamber lined from floor to ceiling with gravest books, presided over by bronze busts of Galen and Hippocrates, Apollo and Hygieia—that chamber sacred to science and thought, chamber where completest peace had reigned in dull serenity till passion entered there. He sighed as he sat down by the table, where the volume he had been reading lay open under the shaded lamp.

"Thank God she was not in the house!" he said to himself. "That man's presence poisons the atmosphere. I'm glad I defied him. He is just the kind of scoundrel to revenge himself at the cost of his own chances, I verily believe; yet I think I had rather the worst should come than go on holding my peace at his mercy. The position was too pitiful. I feel myself a man again, now that I have defied him."

Then after a pause of deepest thought, he said :

"Let the worst come, I have been entirely happy. There is something in that. Is the remembrance of departed joy a sorrow's crown of sorrow? I say no. Across the bleakest desert life knows that unforgotten golden land of joy shines like the lights of a distant haven across the barren sea. I am content to die, having been so utterly happy. I have said to the moment, 'Tarry, thou art so fair!' Then let the bell of doom sound. Let the last hour strike. I have lived long enough. I have had my day. I can afford to say with Othello :

"If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy.'"

He lifted his head from its drooping attitude, and his face was lighted with a gloomy joy.

"And if he goes to my love, and tells his story—tells it in his own lying fashion—will she believe him, against her experience of me? Will all I have ever been to her pass out of her mind in a moment, and only resentment remain? Will all my love for her be too little to set against a stranger's slander? Will her foolish fancy for that dead man rise up against me, strong as in the first hour of her sorrow for his loss? Who can reckon the impulses of a woman's heart? Hers is pure and true and good, but would the affection I have kindled there survive the knowledge of the truth? Would she cleave to me, sinner as I am, and forgive me, as Mary Magdalen was forgiven—because I have loved much? Who can tell? At the worst I am glad I brought matters to an issue. I can tolerate that man as a pensioner, but I will not endure him as a persecutor."

Dr. Ollivant was to sleep in Wimpole-street that night. He had only returned that afternoon from the North of England, whither he had flown, as fast as express trains could convey him, to attend a noble patient. There was time enough yet, at half-past eleven, for him to catch the midnight train to Teddington; but he was not expected there, and it was wiser perhaps to avoid seeing Flora until there had been time for him to recover completely from the agitation of that interview with Mr. Gurner. So much as he yearned to see the fair young face, to look into the innocent eyes and find hope and comfort and promise of fidelity there, he stayed in the quiet old London house, and sat late into the night reading, knowing how little hope of peaceful slumber there was for him that night.

The clear cold light of earliest morning—a sunless solemn light, like the light of some unknown world—looked in upon him from the open windows of the staircase as he went up to his room, calmer in mind and less expectant of evil than he had been some hours ago.

“After all,” he said to himself, “the chances against that man betraying me are a hundred to one. He has everything to gain by silence. The sacrifice of the pension I offered him would be too costly an indulgence of malice.”

CHAPTER XXX.

*"Je ne sais pas au fond de quelle pyramide
De bouteilles de vin, au cœur de quel broc vide
S'est caché le démon qui doit me griser, mais
Je descèpere encore de le trouver jamais."*

LATE as it was when he left Wimpole-street, Jarred Gurner fulfilled his intention of making a second call at Mr. Jobury's, much to the indignation of Mrs. Jobury, who had retired to rest, and was thus deprived of the satisfaction of giving Mr. Gurner what she called a piece of her mind, or in other words, a copious statement of her sentiments upon the subject of a gentleman who worried his friend at an hour when decent people should be in bed and asleep, and whose society was, moreover, at all times eminently injurious and disadvantageous to that friend—who had furthermore borrowed money from that friend, and forgotten to repay it—conduct unworthy of any person calling himself a gentleman, and so on. This jobation, delivered in a shrill soprano, and perhaps culminating in hysterics, Mr. Gurner happily escaped through the circumstance of Mrs. Jobury having put her hair in papers and attired herself in her night-rail.

Mr. Joseph Jobury—familiarily known to his friends as Joe Jobury—was smoking a final pipe after a savoury supper of lamb's-fry, cream cheese, and spring onions, which bulbs lent their perfume to the small and somewhat stuffy parlour. But savagely as he had banished Mrs. Gurner's plate of shrimps, Jarred took no objection to Mr. Jobury's onions. He approached his friend with a radiant countenance, greeted him with hearty loudness, and seated himself in Mrs. Jobury's vacant chair with that agreeable freedom from ceremony which constitutes the chief charm of friendship.

"How do, Joe? The missus told you I meant to look in again, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied the butcher, rubbing his bristly double chin dubiously, "Mrs. J. did say something about it."

"Didn't like my coming so late, I fancy. Ladies are so particular about trifles. The fact was, I wanted to see you upon a

small personal matter that couldn't be deferred. Going to the races to-morrow?"

"Well, yes, I did think of going."

Mr. Jobury had a receding chin, and an undecided manner which seemed to indicate a certain weakness of character. He was stout, florid, and sandy-haired; had an inept smile, and was renowned among his acquaintance for good nature and a liberal table. Whatever brains he had had gone into horse-racing. Taken away from the turf his intellect was infantine. On the turf he was supposed to be a shining light amongst minor lights, and he had won a good deal of money, almost always winning where Jarred Gurner, who secretly despised him, contrived, with amazing astuteness, to lose. As a butcher, Mr. Jobury was nowhere, the business being administered by Mrs. Jobury and the foreman.

"O, you're going, of course," said Jarred. "You wouldn't lose such a day as to-morrow. I suppose you've got a seat to spare for an old friend in your trap?"

"Meaning yourself?" said Mr. Jobury, with evident embarrassment. "Well, you see, the trap only holds two comfortably, and I believe the missus has rather set her heart upon going. She don't often get an outing, and the weather being nice and settled now, it's natural as she should look for a bit of pleasure."

"Well, for my part, I've always thought women out of place on a racecourse. They haven't any business there; and I can't understand how they can find any pleasure there in being pushed about and feeling themselves in everybody's way. But of course, if Mrs. Jobury has a fancy for going, and if she can reconcile her mind to the amount of bad language she's likely to hear on the road home, and the chances of a fight at Brentford turnpike, it wouldn't become me to advise her against it. the trap will hold four pretty near as well as it will hold two, and I don't mind a back seat."

Poor Mr. Jobury's countenance expressed extreme perplexity. He had promised his wife that he would have neither act nor part in taking Mr. Gurner to the races; but Mr. Jobury had acquired his name for good-fellowship from a constitutional inability to say no at the right moment. He could not deny that his tax-cart would hold four, for Jarred had ridden in that vehicle, and knew its capabilities as well as its proprietor. He had not quickness or presence of mind enough to invent any prior engagement: so he was fain to say yes, Jarred should go—even if the missus took objection to his presence and turned "rusty" and stayed at home.

"I should be the last to interfere with a lady's pleasure," said

Jarred, radiant at having gained his point; "but upon my word she'll be better out of it. What enjoyment can it be to a woman to be grilled by a hot sun on a dusty high road? A man can rough it; but home is the proper sphere for a woman, and the closer she sticks to it the better the world appreciates her."

This question agreeably settled, the two gentlemen discussed the chances of the morrow, or rather the day, for the midnight hour had sounded from the American clock in Mr. Jobury's adjacent kitchen, over a friendly glass of gin-and-water, and then Jarred Gurner went back to Voysey-street, hopeful, nay, even confident, though the horses which carried his fortunes were not the horses of Mr. Jobury's choice.

The day began auspiciously with warm sunshine and a light west wind, and those to whom Hampton races meant no more than a summer holiday, a pleasant drive along suburban roads, where the roses and seringa were abloom in neat villa gardens, and the scent of the limes still lingered in the air; through Bushey's stately chestnut groves, and the royal village of Hampton Court, past the old-fashioned green, and the grave old red-brick houses, and the barracks, whence come the cheerful notes of the cornet; along the rustic road and by the bright river—those to whom Hampton races meant pleasure, and not speculation, began the day with hearts as glad as Romeo's when he cried:

"My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne."

Not so did Jarred begin the day. Sleep had been an alien from his pillow through the night-hours. He had found no appetite for his morning rasher. The sporting contributor to the *Daily Telegraph* prophesied against his horses. The hopefulness inspired by his last glass of gin-and-water had departed during those tedious night-hours. Carking care consumed him as he walked to Mr. Jobury's dwelling, before which the tax-cart stood ready,—horse, harness, and vehicle alike lustrous from careful cleaning, and a rug, lined with a florid checked material, orange and purple, flung gracefully across the back of the seat.

Mr. Jobury, though attired in a new suit of gray tweed, a blue tie, and a white hat, did not look cheerful, Mrs. Jobury having resented his weakness of character by an acute attack of sulks, which had rendered the breakfast hour far from harmonious. There was the prospect of his return home, too, looming in the distance, when sulks might give place to hysteria and the more demonstrative forms of feminine displeasure. Altogether Mr. Jobury felt that he entered upon the day's delights heavily weighted. Fate, the great handicapper, had been hard upon him.

Thus it happened that both gentlemen sat in thoughtful silence as they drove along the Oxford-road, past the tall palaces of the Lancastrian gate, onward to the woods of Holland and the scaffolding of new villas, shooting off at a tangent over against Shepherd's Bush, and on towards Hammersmith-bridge and the rustic simplicity of Barnes, through classic Richmond, again across the silver Thames, and to that lovely spot which Horace Walpole called the "county of Twits," past that verdant corner where the wit built his toyshop château, which a lady's purer taste and larger means have transformed and perfected, on to the glades of Bushey. Even the brilliant performance of Titmouse, Mr. Jobury's thoroughbred mare, descended from some fifth-rate racing celebrity, hardly evoked a fair meed of praise from either of the gentlemen who sat behind her.

They brightened a little, however, as they approached the course, and once arrived on that arena, grew animated enough, and so far recovered their spirits as to be able to do justice to the contents of a picnic-basket which Mrs. Jobury had prepared in the innocence of her heart on the previous day. A choice shoulder of lamb, with mint-sauce carefully provided in a soda-water bottle, a slice of stilton, a crusty twopenny cottage, and a handful of tender young onions, the slim firstlings of the onion tribe, were not unwelcome to the appetites of gentlemen who had breakfasted ill.

"I haven't eaten such a meal for the last three weeks," exclaimed Jarred, as he washed down the last crumb of cheese with a deep draught of Guinness.

"Why, so;—being gone, I am a man again."

Jarred's satisfaction was doomed to be brief. The horse he had backed for the next race ran anyhow, or nohow, as Mr. Jobury said. It was lucky for Jarred that the people to whom he had lost money were personal friends, and would be willing to wait a day or so for settlement. The day's results were altogether against him, and the last race left him as completely ruined as a man can be who has very little to lose.

Each disappointment had deepened his gloom. He had drunk deeply, taking all that Mr. Jobury offered him in the way of refreshment, and Mr. Jobury, winning steadily in his pettifoggish way, was inclined to be generous.

"Have another b.-and-s., and keep up your spirits, old fellow," he said every now and then, compassionating that white look of angry despair which had settled upon Jarred's swarthy face. But neither bottled stout nor soda-and-brandy were potent enough to bring Jarred forgetfulness of his vexations. Intoxi-

cation would have been a relief, but to-day strong liquors heated his brain and soured his temper instead of making him gay and reckless. *Il avait le vin triste.*

When Titmouse had been put in the shafts and the worthy butcher was ready to depart, Mr. Gurner announced his intention of returning later, and by rail.

"Lend me a couple of shillings for my ticket, Joe," he said. "I've a little bit of business to settle down this way, and I'll go back by train. You may as well make it a crown, by the bye, against contingencies. It won't hurt you if you never see the money again, after your luck to-day."

"I didn't know you had any friends down this way," remarked Jobury, handing Jarred the money.

"Ah, you see, I've a larger circle of acquaintance than you gave me credit for. But it's a matter of business, not friendship, that keeps me down here. There, Titmouse is fidgety. Ta-ta, old fellow."

Mr. Jobury gave the restless Titmouse her head, and drove off at a rattling pace, startling the crowd through which he cut his way, and vanishing in a white cloud of dust. Jarred took no pains to watch his departure, but turned from the bustle of the racecourse with a darkling countenance, and strolled with heavy laggard steps towards the bridge. Away from the crowd and heat and turmoil of the racecourse, that June eventide was fair enough to have soothed the vexed in spirit. The sun had been shining with his fullest power all day, asserting his might a little too potently for some people, as evidenced by the broiled or melted appearance of the pleasure-seekers who had exposed themselves to his too ardent rays for the last six or eight hours. But now the day-god's car sloped westward, and a mellow radiance lay upon the land, transforming yonder patch of river, gleaming through rush and alder, into molten gold. There was warmth still, but a genial warmth, tempered by cool breezes that bore the freshness of running waters in their soothing breath. If anything could have made Jarred Gurner comfortable in his mind it might have been that change from the broiling heat of day to the balmy atmosphere of evening, from the press and riot of the racecourse to the seclusion of that meadow path by which he took his way towards the river.

His mind was all bitterness, but it happened strangely that he was less bitter against destiny for having disappointed him to-day than against Dr. Ollivant for having disappointed him last night. If he had had a ten-pound note in his pocket, his losses, amounting in all to six or seven pounds, might have been endured with comparative stoicism. But that one accessible source of relief having failed him, he saw ruin imminent. The

gentlemen with whom he had dealings entertained no exalted views upon the point of honour, but they expected to be paid, and would be merciless towards the man who should essay to cheat them. The name of "welsher" was an unpleasant distinction, and one that must bar the working of future problems in the mathematics of the turf.

A free indulgence in bottled stout and brandy-and-soda under a burning sun had neither softened Mr. Gurner's temper nor developed his prudence.

"Ten pounds a quarter!" he said to himself, with ineffable scorn; "ten pounds a quarter, and I am to keep my distance, and be grateful for his generosity! Why, the young woman he married brought him sixty thousand down on the nail, and half a dozen words from me would have stopped the marriage—yes, at the church-door. And I knew that, and held my tongue, and now he refuses me a ten-pound note to get me out of a scrape. Does he take me for a worm, and think he can trample on me with impunity?"

Mr. Gurner decapitated a tall cluster of nettles with a swirl of his cane, in very scorn at the question. What he was to do he had in no wise determined, but he was fully resolved upon desperate measures. Dr. Ollivant had forbidden him to reappear in Wimpole-street. Good. He would invade that more remote and sacred domicile at Teddington. Dr. Ollivant had refused to accord him any farther hearing. So be it. He would be heard by Dr. Ollivant's wife.

"Teddington—that's somewhere down the river," mused Mr. Gurner. "I've heard of Teddington Lock. And his house is pretty sure to be by the river-side, for that's the pleasantest situation, and he's rich enough to indulge himself with the best of everything—thanks to her money on to the back of his own. Let me see now. My best way will be to get a boatman to row me down."

He had walked to Hampton-Court-bridge by this time, and here he made a bargain with a waterman to row him as far as Teddington for a couple of shillings.

It was between seven and eight o'clock when the wherry containing Mr. Gurner and his fortunes glided past the quiet gardens of the old Dutch palace—those chestnut groves where his daughter had spent the one bright day of her girlhood. He passed, unheeding and unknowing, by the little inn at Thames Ditton where Loo and the painter had lingered over their one *tête-à-tête* dinner, the rustic garden where Walter Leyburne had thought out the situation and decided against unreasoning love and Loo.

"You don't happen to know the name of Ollivant down

yonder below the bridge, do you?" asked Jarred, as they passed Kingston.

"Yes, I do," answered the boatman, who was a sharp young fellow. "Red-brick house, near Teddington Lock. They haven't been there long. Gentleman's something in the medical line, I believe. I've seen him and his wife on the water times and often. She's a good deal younger than the gentleman."

"Yes; those are the people I want to see. The garden goes down to the river, I suppose?"

"Right down. They've got a landing-stage and a boathouse."

"That's the ticket. You may row me down there as fast as you like."

"Shall I find her alone," wondered Jarred, "or will he be with her? He was in town last night, but that's no reason he shouldn't be down here this evening. I should like to have her all to myself for one quiet half-hour, and tell her my own story in plain English."

Destiny, all day so adverse, favoured this desire of Mr. Gurner's. The boat shot abreast of Dr. Ollivant's villa by-and-by, and Jarred, in his own phrase, took stock of the place. It wore that look of sleek and smug prosperity which is, of all aspects that wealth can assume, the most aggravating to the vagabond mind. It was an old house—substantially built and simple of design—a house whose colouring time had mellowed to a sombre depth of hue, a house well covered with climbing roses and a wide-spreading wistaria. The long French windows were all open, affording cheerful glimpses of brightness and colour in the interior; the old-fashioned conservatory, which formed one wing of the house, revealed its wealth of orange-trees and camellias.

Never was grass more carefully shorn than the lawn that sloped to the smiling river; never cedar of Lebanon grander than the fine old tree which sheltered one angle of that lawn; never tresses of willow more luxuriant than those which dipped into the stream beside Dr. Ollivant's landing-stage. A lady clad in white was sitting on a rustic bench under the cedar, a table before her with books and work strewn carelessly upon it. She was alone, and reading, her elbow on the table, her head bent a little, her eyes intent upon her book.

"There you are, my pretty one," Jarred said to himself, as he scanned the scene from mid-stream, "and all by yourself too. Nothing could be more convenient. And now, Dr. Ollivant! we'll see who's **master** of the situation—you or I."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Ah me! I fell; and yet do question make
What I should do again for such a sake."

"LAND me at those steps," said Jarred Gurner to the waterman, handing him a florin.

The waterman obeyed, somewhat surprised that a person of Mr. Gurner's calibre should be a visitor at that superior-looking villa. He brought his boat close up to the steps.

"Shall I wait for you, sir?"

"Well, yes, perhaps you'd better. I sha'n't be above half an hour, I daresay, and you can land me near the railway station."

The landing-stage was some distance from the cedar. Mr. Gurner stepped lightly on shore, looked round the garden, and then approached the spot where Flora sat reading. So far as his keen gaze could discover she was the only occupant of the garden. As he drew near her, he heard voices and laughter from one of the open windows—subdued gentleman-like mirth, not the strident peals he had been used to hear in the skittle-ground.

He went close up to the little table under the cedar, noiseless of foot as serpent or adder.

"Mrs. Ollivant," he said gently.

He had a pretty clear idea of what he was doing; all the alcohol he had absorbed not having been strong enough to cloud his brain. He knew he was playing a desperate game, perhaps about to throw away fortune for the sake of a petty revenge—a revenge which would taste sweet to him for the moment, but which would not stand by him like the annuity he pretended to despise. But there was just the chance that he might not be allowed to speak, that he might be bought off at the last moment. This was what he desired and hoped. He was here to show that he was prepared for desperate measures, that what he had threatened last night in Wimpole-street he was ready to perform. He was here to measure his strength with Dr. Ollivant.

Flora rose with a startled look.

"I—I beg your pardon," she said; "are you a friend of my husband's?"

"Your husband and I have had business relations. He is at home, I believe?"

"Yes, he is in the dining-room with a friend. Do you wish to see him?"

"Well, yes, presently. But I should like to have a few words with you first, Mrs. Ollivant, if you've no objection," said Jarred, dropping into a rustic seat close at hand. "I'm a stranger to you, I'm aware; but you hardly seem a stranger to me. Our mutual friend Mr. Leyburne used to talk about you so often."

The delicate cheeks paled suddenly, a distressed look came into the sweet face. Flora took up her work, some trifle of lace and muslin, and began to busy herself with it nervously.

"Did you know Mr. Leyburne?" she asked.

"Intimately. I don't pretend for a moment that my position in life was on a level with his. He painted pictures that didn't sell—I earn my living by cleaning other people's pictures. But he was good enough to treat me as a friend, and I valued his friendship. It was a sad day for me when he met with his death."

"Indeed!"

She would not encourage this somewhat disreputable-looking stranger to talk of her dead lover by so much as another question. Her heart was beating painfully: the bitter waters of memory were stirred. She would hardly have supposed the mere mention of the dead could have caused her so keen a pang. She had lived her new life in a new world, and been happy. She had new affections, new hopes, new duties, new obligations. Yet at a word the unforgotten past came back with sharpest pain.

"Curious thing, rather, his death, wasn't it?" asked Jarred, looking at her searchingly.

"It was a very dreadful thing," she said. "I would rather not talk of it, if you please. No good can come of recalling past sorrow."

"Ah, that's the way of the world—out of sight, out of mind. We save ourselves the trouble of grieving for our friends by trying our hardest to forget them. The dead don't rot in their graves so soon as in our hearts. Well, for my part, I can't forget that poor young fellow—carried off in such a mysterious way. However, it was a lucky stroke for Dr. Ollivant, since I don't suppose you would have thrown over poor young Leyburne to marry the doctor."

"I will trouble you not to speculate about me," said Flora, rising; "I think you are a very insolent person!"

"I'm sorry for that," said Jarred. "Perhaps when you know more about me you'll think differently. I am here to do you a

service. I want to say a few words to you in the presence of your husband. Would it be asking too much from you to step indoors and fetch him? I'll wait here."

Flora paused for a few moments with a puzzled look, and then obeyed the stranger. She felt helpless and alarmed in his presence: he was so different from any one she had ever encountered.

"Who am I to say wants to see him?" she asked.

"Mr. Gurner."

She gave a little start, remembering the old woman in the purple satin gown—the woman who had spoiled her dream of first love.

"The name seems familiar to you," said Jarred.

"Yes, I have heard it before," she answered, leaving him.

Dr. Ollivant and a brother doctor who had come down from town with him were lingering over their claret and strawberries, beguiled by some all-absorbing topic of a somewhat professional and esoteric character.

"I was just coming out to you, darling," said Cuthbert, looking up as his wife entered through the open window. "Morley has determined to go back by the 8.50. I was only waiting to wish him good-bye—Why, Flora, how pale you are!"

He rose and went over to her, scrutinising the pallid face with an anxious gaze. How often he had seen Death's mark upon white cheeks and lips with professional calmness, and the smallest change in her face moved him so deeply!

"My love, you have been sitting in the sun, or doing something imprudent," he said; "let me give you a little wine."

"Excuse my hurrying off," said the visitor, looking at his watch; "but time's up. Good-bye, Mrs. Ollivant; hope your headache will be better to-morrow. The weather's rather trying. Thanks for a charming afternoon. Good-bye, Ollivant!"

He was gone, to the doctor's satisfaction. He had no thought just now but for his wife. If his love for her and his care for her could know increase, there was a reason now why both should be doubled.

"Dearest," he said, "what is amiss?"

"Nothing, dear; or very little. There is a strange man here, on the lawn—he must have come by the river—who wants to see you—a Mr. Gurner."

"He here?"

"Now you are pale, Cuthbert!" cried Flora, startled by his whitening face.

"My love, we are doomed to pass through a struggle which may darken both our lives. I did not know it was so near. Stay, I'll go to this man alone. Go up-stairs, Flora, and lie

down. It is only a business matter. There is nothing that need give you the slightest uneasiness."

In that moment he had made up his mind to stave off the evil hour, to give the informer his price for his wife's sake. She was not strong enough to bear a great shock. He had not duly considered that last night, not believing that Mr. Gurner meant to bring matters to a crisis.

"I want to hear what that man has to say, Cuthbert," said Flora, with a resolute look that was new to her. "Let me hear all and know all. He has been talking to me in such a strange way. He has awakened doubts and suspicions that are worse than certainties. Let me know all—it will be best."

"God knows what is best!" replied her husband. "Come with me, if it must be so, and hear the worst, and judge between me and my love."

He drew her to him and kissed her with deeper passion than in his happiest hour of confidence and love—kissed her as one kisses for whom that kiss may be the last; as Gretchen kissed Faust in the condemned cell; as Bothwell kissed Mary Stuart when they parted at Carberry Hill.

"Come," he said; and they went together to the cedar, where Mr. Gurner sat waiting for them. He had lighted a cigar, one that had been given to him on the racecourse, but he tossed it away half-smoked as the doctor and his wife drew near.

"Now, Mr. Gurner, I have brought my wife to hear what you want from me," said Dr. Ollivant.

"What do I want? Money! and a good round sum. I asked you for a ten-pound note last night, as between man and man. I want fifty to-night."

"Do you? And on what ground shall I give you fifty pounds? You are not a particularly estimable person—not a man whose struggles with misfortune form a noble spectacle for the gods. What will my wife think if I give you fifty pounds?"

"I fancy her thoughts will come pretty near the truth; she will think that you would rather I held my tongue than spoke out."

"I would rather you should speak out," pursued Dr. Ollivant, with that firm look of his, beneath which the lesser man always quailed. "My love," he said to Flora, "this man is going to make a statement that will shock and wound you deeply; only be assured that what you hear from his lips will be but half truth. You shall hear the whole truth from mine afterwards."

She trembled a little and drew closer to him. He put his arm round her, holding and sustaining her. How long, how long would she suffer his touch? O, pleasant days! O, life of

perfect joy! He felt the delight of life slipping away from him yet could not be content to retain it any longer at this scoundrel's sufferance.

"When I spoke to you just now of your first lover, Mrs. Ollivant—of Walter Leyburne, my friend—I didn't tell you that I could have spared you all the suspense and uncertainty you suffered at the time of his death. You hoped, and waited, and prayed for his return, I daresay, for ever so long, not knowing for certain what had become of him."

"I did—I did."

Her pale lips shaped the words, but voice there was none.

"I was a stranger to you and it wasn't my interest to speak out; but Dr. Ollivant could have spared you a good deal of pain—hope deferred, and that kind of thing—if he had chosen," pursued Jarred.

She looked round at her husband, mutely questioning him.

"Hear him to the end, love, and hear me afterwards."

She drew herself away from him, and stood alone, and her husband knew that he was doubted.

"He could have told you all about that unfortunate young man's death; but he was wise enough to hold his tongue. He thought that if you knew he had killed your first lover his own chances of winning you would have been rather weak."

She gave a faint half-stifled cry, and put out her hand to keep her husband back.

"Killed him!"

"Yes. When Mr. Leyburne took his afternoon stroll on the cliff that last day, ill-luck brought him across the path chosen by Dr. Ollivant. They began to talk—about you, I suppose—and soon came to high words. There was a scuffle, and poor Leyburne fell off the cliff. I won't say he was pushed off; but it looked rather like it to me."

"You were there—you saw——"

"I was on the sands below—heard voices and quarrelling, and saw your lover fall. That is all."

"And he," pointing to the doctor, "bribed you—paid you to keep this secret?"

"Well, yes, he has rewarded my discretion pretty well, up to last night. You won't believe my statement, perhaps; but if you want confirmation, look at him."

Jarred pointed in his turn at the doctor, who stood like a rock, but with a face of deadliest pallor.

"Go," he said to Jarred. "You have done your worst; there is no more to be said. You came here by the river, I think. Be good enough to let me see you off my premises."

There was nothing for Jarred to do but follow the doctor

to the landing-stage, where the gaily-painted wherry was waiting for him. He descended to his boat without a word, feeling that he had played rather a poor game after all. To the last he had expected Dr. Ollivant to surrender—to buy his silence at any price when the crisis came. But the crisis was past, and Jarred felt that he had made a fool of himself.

Cuthbert Ollivant went back to the cedar. His wife was standing just as he had left her, rigid, her eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Hear my story now, Flora," he said pleadingly.

She did not look at him as she answered,

"How much am I to believe from so accomplished a deceiver?"

"Believe the simple truth. Walter Leyburne's death was purely accidental. No one, not even you"—with a touch of bitterness—"could regret it more than I did. True that our voices were heard in dispute; true that we wrestled on the verge of that horrid cliff—'twas he attacked me, remember—and that he fell on the slippery grass. The single blow I struck was in self-defence."

"And it killed him," said Flora icily.

The anguish of these moments had transformed her. She was no longer the gentle girlish wife he had known an hour ago. There was a slow bitterness in every accent that changed the very sound of her voice, a cold glitter in her eye that altered the very character of her beauty. So might Electra have looked, changed from her innocent girlhood by the horror of domestic murder.

"That blow could have done no more than stun him, at worst; the rest was accident."

"Which you concealed as studiously as if it had been deliberate murder. And you let me wait, and you let me hope, and you let me wonder—knowing that he was dead, and that his death was your work."

"False, cowardly, vile—was it not? Find the worst name that you can for my crime; it will not be too bad. But remember that all was done for love of you. I sinned, as I would sin again, for your love's sake. I could not shut myself out from all hope by telling you the truth. What chance would there have been for me if I had been candid? And this death-stroke of Fate, which I had not even desired, gave me my chance. I had always said to myself, 'Were he away I could win her.' How could I speak? You would have hated me if you had known."

"Perhaps," she answered, still without looking at him, "but not so deeply as I hate you now. And that would have been an

unjust hatred. This is just and godly—hatred of a liar, hatred of a coward.”

Hard words from one whom nature had made so gentle. The doctor stood silent, wondering at her cruelty. Could that old love be so much, and all that had been since then so little? Was all his love for her—all their happiness, which for him meant so much—to weigh for nothing against the memory of that light fickle lover?

“You do not measure your words,” he said with a new coldness, “I see that the old love was the stronger after all. You have heard the truth, as God hears and judges us. There was no desire in my heart to injure so much as a hair of his head; but I could not let the manner of his death bar my road to happiness. I was willing to be a liar for your sake. For your sake I was a coward. Is that a reason you should hate me?”

“It is,” she answered; and then went on with sudden tears: “My father blessed us on his death-bed—blessed us, and joined our hands in his dying hour. It pleased me to think that I was obeying his last wish when I married you. Do you think he would have put your hand in mine if he had known what I know now?”

“He rewarded my great love. Would that love have seemed less to him if he had known my sin?”

“My father was an honourable man.”

“That will do, Flora. I see that the old love was strongest. All our days, and dreams, and hopes cannot weigh against the mere memory of that—no, not even that holiest bond which should make us one, although I were the greatest sinner upon earth. You despise me, you hate me. Your heart, so tender by nature, can find no pity for my guilt; although I sinned for love of you, although I am lost for love of you. I never knew the meaning of the word sorrow till I knew you. I never knew what pain was till I loved you. I have given you my peaceful days, my desires, my dreams—given you all God ever gave me of hope or joy. But these things cannot weigh against inclination. You loved Walter Leyburne; you have only endured me. It is an old story. Good-bye, my love; I will torment you no more. This house shall be sacred to you henceforward. My mother shall stay here as your housekeeper and companion, if you will allow her; but my shadow shall darken your threshold no more.”

He took her hand, which she left passive in his grasp, pressed it to his lips, and let it fall. And so, without another word, he left her. A brief farewell; and yet, so far as he could see through the thick darkness of his future life, it was to be for ever.

He went into the house, found his mother, and sent her to Flora. There was nothing in his manner to alarm Mrs. Ollivant. He had recovered his self-command, looked at his time-table for the train that would convey him back to London, and left his house so quietly and deliberately, that no one who saw him depart that evening would have guessed that he was leaving his happiness behind him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“O, is it thyself that I mourn,
Or is it that dream of my heart
Which glides from the reach of my scorn,
And soars from the clay that thou art?”

THE bright midsummer days grew warmer. Thickets of bush roses, moss and cabbage and maiden's blush, that had been growing for half a century; rose-clad arches and trellised walks; rank and file of standard, with all the latest achievements of the rose-grower—all were in their glory of bloom and colour in the gardens of the villa near Teddington Lock; but Flora's tranquil wedded life was over. It had vanished like a dream when one awakeneth. She told herself that it was best so, as she paced the rose-walks slowly, feeling a little less strength for that gentle walk day by day, or stood on the grassy bank above the river, looking dreamily down at the swift-flowing water. She told herself that there was no other way but life-long parting for her and Cuthbert Ollivant.

Her first thought on that dreadful evening—her first thought when her brain cleared from the bewilderment of the shock—had been a longing for loneliness; to find some solitary place, where no one would question or attempt to solace her pain. All that she had esteemed and loved had been suddenly reft from her. The man she had trusted was proved a liar. She did not believe Jarred Gurner's word against her husband's—she did not believe Cuthbert Ollivant to have been a murderer; but, on

his own confession, he had been concerned in Walter's death and had hidden his knowledge of the fact, and had deliberately lied to her. Never more could she respect or trust him; never more could she look up to him with childlike reverential feeling, wondering what such a man could find to love in her.

Since that night of torture she had been left in perfect peace. Mrs. Ollivant had been all kindness, but had asked no questions. She had been, perhaps, warned against interference with that silent grief. Life went on as smoothly, and almost as silently, as in one of those enchanted castles, set deep in the mysterious heart of a pathless forest, which abound in fairy lore. Nothing was changed, except that the doctor remained away. There was no longer the excitement of bidding him good-bye in the morning after driving him to the station in a pony-carriage, and of expecting his return to dinner, when he brought back all the news of the day, and, as it were, the very spirit and zest of metropolitan life along with him. It was strange what a blank his absence made in the house, and how everything seemed altered, where other change there was none. It was as if some one were lying dead in one of those empty rooms up-stairs. And yet Flora told herself it was best that it should be so; that Dr. Ollivant had been infinitely wise in severing himself from her so promptly; that union between them must henceforward be of all things the most impossible. She had told him in the passion of the moment that she hated him, and in her own mind she had not reversed the sentence.

She recalled that miserable time at Branscomb, the dreary days that followed Walter's disappearance. She dwelt on every detail of those days with a morbid grief. How she had wondered—how she had waited—while he, who knew the truth, pretended to sympathise and to assist; sent telegrams which he knew to be useless; took counsel with Mark as to the best thing to be done; kept up the pretence of ignorance with unabashed hypocrisy. Could she do less than hate him, remembering this?

And yet, despite this loathing of his falsehood, and even hatred of himself as the very incarnation of falsehood, how cruelly she missed him! how empty and purposeless her life seemed without him! If she took up a book, and tried to lose herself in a world beyond her own petty circle of perplexities and regrets, she could but remember how her mind had been little more than a sheet of blank paper before Dr. Ollivant began to cultivate it; how much he had taught her; how infinitely he had widened her possibilities of happiness; how patient, how careful, how tenderly indulgent he had been through all the cloudless days of her wedded life; exacting so

little, giving so much; humble, and taking her love as a boon.

But he had been so vile a sinner—for her sake—that it was impossible she could ever think of him again save with scorn and abhorrence.

“What did he gain by all that deceit?” she asked herself. “What did he gain by degrading himself so deeply. Only me.”

She wondered at her own worthlessness, which to this man had been above all price, even above the cost of honour and truth. She pitied him for having bartered so rich a pearl for such tinsel.

“There are hundreds of women in London prettier and more agreeable than I am; and yet for my sake—just to win such a foolish girl for his wife—he was content to sink so low!”

The enigma puzzled her, and she pitied him a little for having been so foolish.

Mrs. Ollivant behaved admirably. Her son had written her a long letter, but had explained nothing. A misunderstanding had arisen between him and Flora, he told her, which would, he hoped, be temporary; nothing that his mother or any one else could do or say would alter the state of the case, he added, foreseeing intervention and worry; events must take their course. He begged his mother to stay at Teddington, and do all in her power to make his dear wife’s existence happy, trusting to Providence for a happy issue out of present perplexities. He went on to give careful and business-like instructions for the carrying on of affairs at the villa, with a thoughtfulness that was almost woman-like.

Dull, empty days. The summer roses bloomed and withered, and all the grass was strewn with petals; but Flora, whose delight it had been to gather and arrange them, left bowls and vases empty, and suffered the flowers to die ungathered; until Mrs. Ollivant came to the rescue, and made a daily raid, in a strictly business-like manner, with big garden-scissors and capacious basket. That tranquil repose and silence of the house became beyond measure melancholy. There were sunlight and warmth and flowers and brightness and colour throughout the rooms, and the garden and glancing river outside the windows, but voices and laughter were mute; for the occasional speech of the two ladies seemed hardly to stir the silence. When she was not roaming listlessly in the garden, Flora spent her hours on a sofa reading; or musing, with her eyes fixed upon one particular patch of carpet or wall.

There was a restraint between the two women, truly as they loved each other. In all their conversations each feared to touch some perilous point, and thus their talk became of necessity

studied commonplace. Every day Flora grew more languid, and less inclined for even these poor little intervals of talk. The local surgeon whom Dr. Ollivant had intrusted with the care of his wife's health—an elderly man, of good standing in his profession—opined that this languor and lowness of spirits were only natural—to be expected at such a time.

"I wish Dr. Ollivant could give you more of his society," said the surgeon, Mr. Chalfont, in his cheerful tone; "that would brighten you a little, no doubt. But of course, with his extensive practice, it is impossible; a man in his position is the slave of his own reputation."

Mr. Chalfont was completely ignorant of the fact that Dr. Ollivant had ceased altogether to come to the Willows.

One day he gently reproved his patient on account of certain red circles which disfigured her pretty eyes.

"I am very much afraid we have been crying," he said with a shocked air. "Now, really this will not do. Mrs. Ollivant"—appealing to the elder lady—"you must not allow this. Tranquillity of mind just now is most essential; and, surrounded as we are by all that can render life happy, why should there be any tears? We must go out more; we must get more fresh air."

Flora promised, with a pathetic little smile, that there should be no more tears.

"I wish to obey you," she faltered, "for—for the sake of——" And here broke into a sob that alarmed the family doctor.

For whose sake—for whom had she to live, what charm, or hope, or pride, or glory, could life hold for her henceforward?

"Hysterical," murmured Mr. Chalfont.

He prescribed for the hysteria, and sent his patient one of those mild solutions of ether or ammonia which are supposed to regulate the throb of foolish hearts, and tranquillise the pulses fluttered by a mind ill at ease; the sort of anodyne which, in a more advanced stage of civilisation, Shakespeare's physician would have insisted upon sending to Macbeth by way of practical reply to the usurper's famous question.

A week later Dr. Ollivant received a telegram early one morning from his faithful friend at Teddington.

Providence had permitted him to be a father only for one brief hour. The eyes of his infant son had opened on life's bleak morning for so brief a span that the father was unable to see their brightness. All had happened prematurely, and in the dead of night. His wife lived, but was very weak, the telegram informed him.

He was at the Willows as soon as cab and train could convey

him there. He stood in the darkened chamber, with its summer coolness and perfume of many roses, bending over the little waxen form of his first-born, his mother beside him, weeping their mutual blighted hopes.

"I should have been so fond of him, so proud of him, Cuthbert; and he was so like you," sobbed the disappointed grandmother.

Dr. Ollivant smiled ever so faintly. There was little in that baby-face, so pale and flower-like—a snowdrop half unfolded—to recall the stern mould of his own features.

His wife's room was on the opposite side of the corridor, only a few paces distant, but there he dared not enter. She was very weak; there was no danger, Mr. Chalfont told him—he had brought down one of the most distinguished practitioners in London to confirm Mr. Chalfont's opinion—but the utmost care was needed.

"Then I will not see her," said Dr. Ollivant.

"But, my dear sir, surely your presence—a few consoling words from you——"

"Might cause undue agitation," interrupted Dr. Ollivant. "Does she seem much grieved by the loss of her child?"

"Well, so far as I can discover from her manner, not acutely. She moaned a little when your mother told her of the infant's death, and murmured something indistinctly; but she has shed no tears for the poor little fellow. There seems a general depression of mind, rather than any passionate grief. As she recovers strength we must endeavour to cheer and rouse her. I am sorry to see you so deeply affected by your loss, my dear sir," added Mr. Chalfont, compassionating that look of fixed trouble in the doctor's face—a certain hopeless look not to be mistaken.

"Yes, it is a great disappointment. My poor little boy! It would have been sweet to me to work for him, to think of him in my loneliest hours. My son! It is hard to say those words only of the dead. My son!"

He stayed at the Willows all that day and all night, but took care that Flora should be ignorant of his presence. All night he sat alone in the room adjoining that solemn chamber where his dead child lay; and once in the dead of the night, and once in the faint gray of the early morning, he went in and crouched by the little bed.

"I accept thy chastisement of my sin, O Lord," he said; "but let not the burden of my wrong-doing fall upon my innocent wife!"

Never perhaps in all his life had he made so direct an appeal to his Creator and Judge; never before had prayer so earnest, so utterly sincere, gone forth from those worldly lips.

He received the blow that had fallen upon him in all humility, but the stroke was not the less heavy. He had counted upon winning his child's affections in the days to come, although he might never regain the love of his wife. The child would be a link between them, even though he, the husband, remained hateful in Flora's eyes; a tie that must needs draw them together sometimes, though their looks and words might be cold when they met.

For more than a week Flora's state was precarious, and in all that time Dr. Ollivant came to and fro, spending every hour that he could spare from his professional duties at the Willows; resting little, full of anxiety and care, watchful of nurses and doctor, but never entering his wife's room. When she had taken a fortunate turn, and was progressing entirely to Mr. Chalfont's satisfaction, Dr. Ollivant went back to Wimpole-street for good, as hopeless as a man can well be and yet bear the burden of life.

Flora came slowly back to life and care. She had been only half conscious of existence during her illness; too weak for grief, almost too weak for memory. Returning strength brought a renewal of her woes. Again she recalled the past, and brooded over her sorrow and her wrongs, and thought of her murdered lover—it was thus she called him in her heart, although she had never doubted her husband's version of the story. That accident, in her mind, was murder. If those two had never quarrelled, if there had been no lurking hatred of Walter in the doctor's mind, that accident would not have happened. Evil feeling had been the root of all.

But deeply as she deplored her first lover's hard fate—cut off untimely in the blossom of his days—robbed of fame and all bright things that earth can give—and earth, although roundly abused in a general way, has a good many pleasant things to bestow—deeply as she lamented the cruel fate of genius and youth, her keenest anguish was the knowledge of her husband's dishonour. She had thought him so good and great, so high above her girlish weakness; and by this one base deception—not the sin of a moment, but the sustained lie of years—he had placed himself in the dust under her feet, had by this one great treachery made all his other virtues worthless. All that he had been to her meant nothing now. He was taken out of her life and her memory. There was no such man upon earth as that Cuthbert Ollivant she had revered and loved; not with the girlish unreasoning devotion she gave the young painter, born of a girl's day-dreams and fancies, but with a woman's riper and holier affection.

Health returned, and strength in moderate measure; but there was a lack of that vitality which was to be expected in so young a patient. Mr. Chalfont attributed this joyless languor to grief for the baby's death, and came to the conclusion that change of air and scene would be beneficial to Flora.

"A month or six weeks at the seaside," he suggested; "in some nice bracing air—Bridlington or Scarborough."

"I detest the seaside!" said Flora petulantly. That sweetness of temper which had been one of her chief graces was not always to be counted upon now. She was fretful and impatient at times, impatient even of kindness when it was inopportune.

"You are tired of some watering-places, perhaps," persevered Mr. Chalfont; "but you would be interested in a place that was quite new to you. The Yorkshire coast, for instance."

"Yorkshire!" ejaculated Flora; "there is something hateful even in the name. It sounds cold and barren. I shiver at the very thought of it."

"Now, really this is fanciful, my dear young lady, remonstrated the patient doctor; "we'll say no more about Yorkshire, however. The grand point is that you should have change of scene."

"I don't care for change of scene. I like the Willows better than any other place, or as well as any other place," replied the patient wearily.

"It is only natural you should feel attached to such a delightful home. But for your health's sake I strongly advise—nay, with Dr. Ollivant's concurrence, I shall venture to order—a complete change of scene. If you don't like the idea of an English watering-place, suppose you were to go farther afield. To some German spa, for instance, or to the Swiss lakes."

"I shouldn't care about going abroad," Flora answered in the same listless way, "and I don't think mamma would like to go so far; would you, dear?" with a gentle look at the patient mother-in-law.

"My love, I would go anywhere for your good," said Mrs. Ollivant.

"O mamma, that was said so like Cuthbert!"

The old name came unawares. For just one moment Flora had forgotten all save that the mother's devoted love was like the son's. She turned her head upon the sofa-pillows to hide her sudden tears.

"Highly nervous," murmured the doctor, with a glance at the elder lady. "Suppose you leave everything to me, my dear lady," he went on blandly to Flora, "and I will contrive to have a little chat with your husband, and arrange matters,

subject to his advice. He is generally at home in the evening, I suppose?"

"Not just now," said Mrs. Ollivant, colouring; "he is too busy."

"Ah, the slave of his own greatness! Well, in that case I will slip up to town and see him there."

"Why should I go away, mamma, and cause you more care and trouble?" asked Flora, when Mr. Chalfont had left them. "Why should I try to prolong a life which is useless to all the world and only a burden to myself?"

"My dearest Flora, you know that to two people at least your life is a treasure above all price. O Flora, why are you so foolish? What is the meaning of this estrangement between you and my son? He has forbidden me to speak, but I think I have kept silence too long. I have been mistaken in my obedience to him. I see you unhappy. I know that he is most wretched. If you had seen him when you were ill——"

Mrs. Ollivant checked herself, but too late. The secret was out. Flora had raised herself from her pillows and was looking curiously at the speaker.

"What, mamma? Did you see him while I was ill? He came here, then?"

"He did, Flora; but I was told not to mention his coming. He was here night and day till all peril was past."

"But he would not see me. He kept his word. Mamma, you must never talk of him to me again. It is useless. We have bid each other an eternal farewell. Go back to him, if you like. I have no right to divide mother and son. Let me go anywhere, mamma; I will live with any people Dr. Ollivant chooses for my guardians. I will obey him in all things."

"But can you never be his happy wife again, Flora?"

"Never, mamma."

"Try to remember how happy your life was before this miserable estrangement."

"Try to remember! Do you suppose I have ever forgotten?"

There was much more said, all to the same purpose; Mrs. Ollivant pleading eloquently. Was she not pleading for that which was most precious to her in this mortal life—her son's happiness? But she argued in vain. Flora answered with a sweet sad calmness. Of all impossible things there was nothing more impossible than reunion for these two.

Mr. Chalfont called in Wimpole-street that evening. He found the doctor alone among his books in the vault-like consulting-room. The house had already fallen away from its perfect freshness and neatness, for lack of Mrs. Ollivant's vigi-

lant care. The geraniums in the hall-window looked seared and yellow; there was dust on the shining hall-table; the umbrella-stand was disfigured by a charwoman's bloated gingham.

But the worst and most visible change was in Dr. Ollivant himself. He looked older by ten years than he had looked six months ago in the early spring, when he had been busy with the furnishing and improvements at the Willows.

He started up from his desk at sight of the Teddington surgeon, alarm in his look and gesture.

"My dear sir," cried Mr. Chalfont, "I am no messenger of ill news. Our patient is going on very nicely. But I have come up to town in order to have half an hour's quiet chat with you. Upon my word, you appear more in need of my services than your sweet wife. You are looking far from well."

"I am rather fagged," replied Dr. Ollivant carelessly.

"Burning the candle at both ends, I fear."

"Meaning the candle of life? Well, I don't know that one need regret that, provided one makes a blaze. That double flame has its effect on one's generation, and if it doesn't last quite so long as the steadier light——"

He finished his sentence with a careless shrug of his shoulders. Mr. Chalfont, looking at him from a professional point of view, did not at all approve of his appearance.

"You want rest, my dear sir," he murmured soothingly. "If you could manage to take a holiday now, were it only for a week or two, and accompany your dear wife to some agreeable resort——"

"Impossible," said the other shortly. "But you came here to talk of my wife, not of me."

Mr. Chalfont, thus called to order, stated his case plainly. His sweet young patient's health was decidedly improved, but there was still a want of vigour. The rebound was not what he had expected. She was evidently fretting for the loss of her infant. Natural, very, remarked Mr. Chalfont from the philosophical standpoint of a man who had had to deplore the loss of a good many infants during his professional career, and did not find himself much the worse for that affliction. Change of scene was indispensable.

"Let her go to whatever spot on earth is fairest in her fancy," said Mr. Ollivant. "My mother shall go with her, and all that forethought, care, and money can do shall be done to assure her comfort."

Then followed a discussion as to where the patient should be taken, since, according to Mr. Chalfont's showing, she had no wish of her own—nay, was positively apathetic upon the subject.

"Scotland," suggested the family doctor. "Too cold perhaps."

"Decidedly too cold."

"Nice, or Cannes."

"Too warm."

"Biarritz, the Pyrenees."

"Too far. I could not bear to think of her so distant from me, unless it were her own especial wish."

"She is entirely indifferent to locality. What do you say to Ireland?"

"I suppose you mean Killarney?" said Dr. Ollivant.

"English people generally do when they talk about Ireland in the tourist's sense."

"Certainly. Mrs. Chalfont and I spent a week there a few years ago, and we were charmed with all we saw. The scenery is really something beyond description, and the cuisine of the hotel where we stayed was excellent. I don't think I ever enjoyed myself so much. The air is lovely—mild, pure, invigorating. I really feel inclined—always with your approval—to recommend Killarney."

"Let her go to Killarney, then, if she likes."

"If you could only contrive to accompany her," urged Mr. Chalfont.

"Out of the question," replied the doctor wearily, as if he were annoyed at having the suggestion repeated.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"As there is much beast and some devil in man, so is there some angel and some good in him."

"The modern majesty consists in work. What a man can do is his greatest ornament, and he always consults his dignity by doing it."

THAT satisfaction which unregenerate man derives from having given free indulgence to his evil passions, having poured the strong wine of vengeance into a cup and drunk the draught to the lees, is not a lasting content. The fiery flavour is pleasant enough for the moment, but the strength of the drink soon evaporates in the chilling atmosphere of reason. As to all commoner orgies there comes the gray light of to-morrow's dawn, so to this drunkenness of angry passion comes also the morrow, when the man who last night flung all his chances of advantage away for the brief rapture of revenge begins to reckon on consequences, and to consider whether he has not bought his triumph a little too dearly.

Jarred Gurner went back to Voysey-street in every way a loser.

"I've done it," he said to himself very often, pride sustaining him just for a little while against the sense of loss. "He didn't think it was in me, perhaps. I've done it. I've shown him that a man's a man for a' that, and a' that, and twice as mickle as a' that," muttered Mr. Gurner, snapping his fingers defiantly at the empty air.

Then in his fine baritone voice—husky, but still a noble organ, he trolled out the bold defiant words: a brave man's defiance of adverse fate and an adverse world:

"What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hodden gray, and a' that;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that!

For a' that, and a' that,
Their tinsel show and a' that,
The honest man, though e'er so poor,
Is king o' men for a' that!"

Voysey-street resounded with the full ripe tones of that voice, which might have made a better man's fortune. It was past

eleven, and the last beer had been fetched, and the public-houses were closing somewhat noisily, as Jarred returned to his domicile. He found his mother standing in the doorway, gazing dreamily into the street.

"What, sitting up for me, old lady?" he asked, with an air of jollity which was somewhat spurious. He wanted to persuade himself that he was not sorry for the evening's work, that he did not think himself an abject blockhead; and in this desire to stand well with himself he even went so far out of his way as to be civil to his mother.

"Yes, Jarred; I felt a little low this evening. The weather was so warm, and the sunset was all gold and rose-colour over Cave-square; it put into my mind the lives of people who enjoy themselves in nice country-places in such weather, and that made my life seem rather hard. Perhaps I give way more than I ought; but if it's in one's nature to be sensitive it's difficult to fight against one's feelings. I hope you had a pleasant day, Jarred."

"Not particularly pleasant. Perhaps if you knew the feelings of people who go out pleasuring, you wouldn't think it so hard to stay at home."

His manner was kinder, his words were more frank, than usual. Mrs. Gurner felt absolutely cheered.

"I thought perhaps you might come home hungry, and want a nice little bit of supper, Jarred," she said. "Oysters are out, but it isn't too late for me to get a lobster round the corner, and there's a lettuce on the stones in the scullery."

"No, thank you, mother. I haven't appetite enough for a strawberry-ice. But I should like a glass of gin-and-water cold, if you happen to have a drop of spirit in the house."

"Yes, Jarred; there's a little gin in the cupboard; I fetched it yesterday for my inside."

"People generally do take it that way, don't they, mother, internally?"

"I mean that my inside was bad, Jarred, or I should not have partaken of any spirit," replied Mrs. Gurner with dignity.

They went into the parlour, where a guttering tallow candle flared in the gloom. It did not look by any means as cheery or comfortable as the same room two or three years ago, in the winter-time, when the fire was blazing merrily, and Loo's dark eyes reflected the blaze. Jarred sat down wearily, giving himself up to reflection, while his mother went to the tap to fetch a jug of cold water.

Perhaps those words of the poet's had inspired him with a new sense of manliness, for at this moment he felt almost glad that he had destroyed his future chances of gain from Dr.

Ollivant. He had felt himself so debased, such a paltry creeping scoundrel, every time he approached his victim and advanced the spy's claim for hush-money. He had seemed to himself worse than the informers who go about after lawful hours obtaining beer from innocent publicans.

Perhaps there is no depth to which a man can sink so low as to render him unconscious of his fall. The helpless victims who are born in social debasement, created in the night of poverty and degradation, may indeed be ignorant of their state; but the man who has known the light of education, who has fallen from something better, can he forget?

Just as Cuthbert Ollivant, even amidst his agony, had rejoiced at having shaken himself free from his persecutor, so Jarred Gurner, with ruin starting him in the face, felt some touch of pride, some sense of recovered manhood, in the knowledge that he had flung away his chances of extorting money from the doctor.

But ruin did stare him in the face, nevertheless, and Mr. Gurner awoke from the sensuous sloth of his later life, and came to the conclusion that he must work, and work his hardest, work against time, in order to pay the money he had lost on Hampton racecourse to-day.

"If I could find that blessed Straduarius back," mused Jarred, scratching his head meditatively, as he thought of the violin lying in pieces up-stairs—violin for skilful manipulation of which he had been offered a five-pound note. "There's no swindling old Ahasuerus," he said to himself, thinking of his client, an ancient dealer in musical instruments in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, who pretended to remember Corelli, and on this and other grounds was popularly supposed to be the Wandering Jew. "He knows every mark in the grain of that fiddle-back, I'll be bound. If I could only find it. People don't eat violin-backs; it must be somewhere about the house, unless the second floor's children have got hold of it, and made it into a toy-cart or a battledoor."

Stimulated to exertion by stern necessity, Mr. Gurner resolved upon hunting for the missing piece of wood early to-morrow morning. He drank a tumbler of weak gin-and-water, conversed with his mother quite sociably, and left that lady to the retirement of the back parlour and the press-bedstead, in a happier frame of mind than was her wont.

He rose at ten next morning, which for his late habits was an early hour; and before indulging in the luxuries of toilet or breakfast, set to work, honestly and earnestly, to hunt for the Straduarius back. This quest involved the complete turning-out of his workshop,—all the dusty corners, the heaps of odds

and ends and accumulated rubbish on the piano, the bills and circulars and forgotten letters, and old cigar-boxes and cracked tobacco-jars, and oil-bottles and varnish-rags, and old boots laid aside because it was a doubtful question whether they were worth the cost of cobbler's work.

"I wish I had Loo here to help me," he thought, as he paused with a despairing glance at the chaos of rubbish which he had shifted from one place to another, without having introduced anything like order into the arrangement thereof. As with all domestic litter, there was much that he could not make up his mind to throw away. "No, I won't be so bad a father as to wish her back again, poor lass!" he went on; "she's better off where she is. But this place was never such a den in her time. And if the old lady attempts to put things square she's pretty sure to hide half of 'em. I daresay she's at the bottom of my losing that unlucky Straduarius."

By-and-by, working with more patience than was usual with him, Mr. Gurner—like Herakles when he had turned the course of the rivers Alpheius and Peneius—began to see something like order around him. The useless varnish and oil-rags were thrown into a heap for burning; the old boots were set out in a row for studious contemplation; the cigar boxes were emptied of their odds and ends—old buttons, old steel pens, fragments of sealing-wax, broken wafers, shreds of tobacco; the tatterdemalion books were set up on their shelf, looking like Falstaff's ragged regiment.

Jarred considered his morning's work with a sigh. It was something, perhaps, to have set his room to rights; but he had lost all hope of ever finding the Straduarius back.

"And yet I'll swear I never took it out of this room," he said to himself. "It must be those confounded brats upstairs."

It was his habit to lock the door of this sanctum and put the key in his pocket when he went out, now that Loo was no longer there to protect his belongings, but he occasionally omitted that precautionary measure. One of those children from the second floor must have crept in one day, on an exploring expedition, and stolen the violin-back.

He had questioned Mrs. Gurner closely as to her knowledge of the missing object, but upon this subject Mrs. Gurner's mind was a blank.

"You ought to know that I never throw away a shred or a scrap of anything in your room, Jarred," she said reproachfully.

"Perhaps not, mother; but you might have poked it away into some corner."

Now, however, the corners had all been turned out, and

Jarred no longer cherished any hope that the Straduarius lurked among the dust and lumber of his apartment.

He invoked something which was the reverse of a blessing on the unconscious heads of his lodger's children, and sat down, gloomy of aspect, the only ray of hope which had lighted his pathway quenched in darkness.

"I could have finished the violin by Saturday night," he thought, "and Ahasuerus's fiver would have put all things square."

He placed himself before the row of shabby boots, and began the task of inspection. His wardrobe was getting weak in this particular, and it had come to a question of soling and heeling. Foremost in the rank stood a pair of wellingtons—boots of which Jarred had been proud in his time. True that wellingtons have been left behind in the progress of fashion; but, as Jarred was wont to remark, there was always something in a wellington which made it superior to all other boots. He looked at those tall and lordly boots despondently. They bulged a little at the sides, and too faithfully reproduced in a permanent form all blemishes and faulty bosses in the foot of the wearer. They were boots of which Jarred could hardly feel proud, even though the souther's art might make them sound and weather-tight.

"They'll pay for repair anyhow," he said to himself with resignation, and took up one of the once-lovely boots.

The toe hitched the loose top of the battered old piano, and half lifted it.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Jarred, "I never looked inside the piano."

He had opened it in another instant—nay, dragged off the front, with its faded red-silk flutings and broken brasswork, as if he had been about to tune the instrument. Yes, there lay the Straduarius back, behind the rusty wires, just as it had fallen, most likely, when Mrs. Gurner cleaned the room—an operation she performed at long intervals, in concert with the girl.

Jarred ran to the head of the stairs, and called over the balusters:

"Send me up some strong tea and a rasher, mother; and bring me a bundle of firewood to melt some glue. I'm going in for a long day's work."

He felt more appetite than he had known for a long time—felt his strength and his manhood renewed. There is a wholesome flavour in honest work, which freshens even the most faded spirits.

He began his task at once with glues and varnishes and oils, whistling to himself softly as he worked, and with the artist's

pleasure in his art—not a very exalted art, perhaps, that of the violin doctor, and in some wise allied to chicanery, yet a kind of art notwithstanding. He was going to create something, were it only a spurious fiddle.

Mrs. Gurner brought her son's breakfast with her own hands, proud and happy to wait upon him when he condescended to smile.

"I've found the violin-back in that blessed old hurdy-gurdy," said Jarred, pointing to the superannuated instrument. "You must have dropped it in there some day when you were at your confounded cleaning."

Mrs. Gurner protested that only "the girl" could have been capable of so stupid an act. "It's like her," she remarked; and Jarred said no more.

"You can get me a bit of dinner by five o'clock, old lady," he said, doing justice to the rasher and poached egg. "I dare say I shall have got up an appetite by that time."

"I hope so, Jarred. It does my heart good to see you partake of your food with a relish, and it seems like old times to see you at work here. Would you like a bit of roast lamb and half a peck of peas?—they're only just in, and young and tender."

"What you like, mother. I haven't a sixpence to give you."

"Never mind, Jarred; I can get the lamb on trust at Simons's."

Mr. Gurner worked on indefatigably for four or five hours, whistling softly to himself as he laboured, pleased with his own skill. "This fiddle will be worth a hundred guineas to old Ahasuerus," he said, as he scraped and polished, and gave deeper tones to the colour of the wood.

He ate his dinner with much enjoyment, praised his mother's cooking, and made himself generally agreeable. Even when he had smoked his after-dinner pipe, and Mrs. Gurner was prepared to see him take his departure, he still sat on. That delightful society he was wont to seek had just now lost its charm for him, since in the circle of his intimates he was likely to meet the men to whom he was indebted, and to a man of Mr. Gurner's fine mind a debt of honour was intolerable. He could have faced an angry water-rate collector, could have suffered the worst penalties of the county court without a pang, but he could not brook so much as a whisper of that vile epithet "welsher."

So he sat in his back parlour, smoking and turning over the leaves of a dilapidated old sporting magazine.

"I do believe your stopping at home has been lucky to me, Jarred," said his mother presently. "I had a bit of good fortune to-day."

"Did you now? Found some silver screwed up in a bit of paper in some of the crockery yonder, I suppose. I never knew such an old party for screwing up money in bits of newspaper."

"No, Jarred. I have too many calls for money to mislay it. That wasn't my good luck. You know that handsome voylet-coloured satin in the window?"

"Know it!" exclaimed Jarred contemptuously; "I know it as well as I do the union-jack, and am about as tired of seeing it."

"Well, Jarred, your eyes will never be offended by it again; though I do say so—long as it has been upon my hands—a handsomer dress was never offered a bargain. I've sold it."

"Have you? Why, then, I shall begin to believe in Dr. Cumming, and that the end of the world isn't far off."

"It's all very well to have your joke, Jarred, but it isn't my fault if business isn't brisker. The fact is, there's no money to spare in Voysey-street, or the dress wouldn't have hung in my window so long."

"How did you manage to get rid of it at last?" asked Jarred carelessly.

"Well, it was about half an hour after I'd taken up your breakfast, and I was dusting this room, while the girl shelled the peas, when I heard the shop-door bell go tinkle tinkle, timid like. 'Ah,' thinks I, 'it's one of your wandering Christians, as some one calls 'em, come to ask the price of half the things in my shop, with no more intention of buying than of leaving me an independency;' so I gave a sort of a groan and went to see who it was."

Mrs. Gurner paused to give effect to her narration, allowing a brief interval of suspense, with a view of stimulating her hearer's interest.

"Who should it be, Jarred, but old Mrs. Hagstock, Mrs. Simmons's mother; a very respectable old lady, who lives over at Simmons's, and helps to keep things straight, Mrs. Simmons's time being taken up with the business and her young family. Well, she wishes me good morning, and I return the compliment, and ask her to take a chair; and then she ups and tells me that her youngest grandson—a fine baby, for I saw him in his mother's arms this morning when I went over to pick that shoulder of lamb—is to be christened to-morrow, and she wanted to look the lady at the ceremony, and there was to be a tea-party in the evening; and then she says: 'To put it plainly with you, Mrs. Gurner, what is the lowest you can take for that plum-coloured satin, if so be that it's my length?'"

Here again Mrs. Gurner paused for oratorical effect.

"Well, Jarred, I measured the skirt against her, and it was full three inches on the ground, which would allow for taking off a piece at the gathers, where the satin was a trifle rubbed. 'Mrs. Hagstock,' says I, 'with every wish to oblige you, I couldn't in justice to myself and family take less than fifty shillings for that dress. It would be wasted breath,' says I, 'to praise the quality of the satin; if it doesn't stand alone it's only because no dress ever did stand alone. There—they don't make such satins nowadays,' says I. Upon which that artful old woman turned round upon me and said it was an old-fashioned colour. 'It's like old china,' says I, 'if it is old-fashioned. It's a colour and a quality that you can't get for love or money.'"

"Never mind what you said to the old lady, and what the old lady said to you, mother. How much did you screw out of her?"

"Well, after half an hour's talk, she brought out one pound seventeen-and-six. I believe it was every penny she had in the world, Jarred, so I let her have the dress. And with the white Paisley shawl she was married in, and has kept laid by ever since, she'll look quite the lady to-morrow. I think I shall step round to the church and have a peep at her, just to see how the satin looks upon her."

"It might be a novelty to you to see the inside of a church, certainly," replied Jarred jocosely.

The Voysey-street people were not great church-goers, preferring, as a rule, to devote their Sabbath mornings to culinary operations, and their Sabbath evenings to a friendly gossip on their door-steps, or a summer stroll to the Regent's Park.

The violin was finished by Saturday, and the violin-doctor received his price from Mr. Ahasuerus, who paid the money ungrudgingly and promised more work.

"Corelli never played upon a better instrument," said the old gentleman as he put the fiddle to his shoulder and ran a bow lightly across the strings. And from that hour he almost believed that the violin was a genuine Straduarus, or rather he made believe so well that he only just escaped self-deception.

Jarred felt ever so much more of a man as he walked away from Leicester-square with five sovereigns of hard-earned money in his waistcoat-pocket. Twenty, nay fifty, pounds extorted from Dr. Ollivant could not have done him half so much good. He went back to his accustomed haunt—the parlour at the King's Head—with his crest erect met his creditors with a

bold and open front, paid so much of his debt as he could, and promised to pay the balance before the next week was out. Conduct so honourable to manhood elicited the applause of the parlour, and Jarred might have regaled himself at the expense of his friends to a dangerous extent had he been so minded.

For once in a way, however, Mr. Gurner was proof against temptation. He took no more than was consistent with a liberal interpretation of that valuable virtue sobriety, and walked back to Voysey-street, still erect of mien and clear of speech, a few minutes before eleven.

In the semi-darkness of the passage he encountered his mother in a state of wild excitement.

"O Jarred," she exclaimed, "wonders will never cease! There's such a surprise for you."

"Lord bless the old lady, she's all of a twitter!" cried Jarred. "What surprise?"

"Loo!"

He waited for not another word, but pushed past his mother and dashed into the parlour.

There, in the shabby little dimly-lighted room, stood a lady, dressed in fawn-coloured silk—a fabric with deep shades of brown and bright flashes of gold in its lustrous folds; a dress fashioned with a grandiose simplicity; voluminous, flowing, artistic; not a style after *Le Follet* or Mr. Worth, but rather after Titian and his contemporaries. The lady's raven hair formed a splendid coronal at the top of her well-shaped head; her olive complexion was vividly contrasted by a ribbon of deepest blue, which showed above the lace ruffle she wore about her neck; a single sapphire shone darkly bright in each small ear. Loo, indeed, but a changed and glorified Loo; a Loo who had never been seen in Voysey-street before to-night.

"My girl," cried Jarred rapturously, as he clasped her in his arms, "why, what a beauty you have grown!"

"Do you really think I've improved, father?" she asked shyly.

"Improved! Why, I haven't seen your match for many a day. Didn't I always tell you there were the makings of a fine woman in you? But I didn't suppose you'd turn out such a stunner. And what a surprise to see you here to-night, Loo, when I thought you were in Naples! Egad, if I'd known you'd been nearer I should have written to ask you to help me out of a difficulty, though it is against the rules in that case made and provided. But tell me what brought you to England."

And then father and daughter sat down side by side, and talked together confidentially—Loo with all her old fondness for the scampish father she had slaved for and admired in the years that were gone. They sat and talked together freely, happily, with unrestrained words, with unclouded brows; which could hardly have been possible to either if Voyseystreet had been correct in its least charitable suppositions as to Louisa's history.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

*"Et je pleurais, seul, loin des yeux du monde,
Mon pauvre amour enseveli."*

*"This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
I better brook than flourishing peopled towns:
Here can I sit alone, unseen of any,
And to the nightingale's complaining notes
Tune my distresses, and record my woes."*

IN the drowsy August weather, just when the heat and glory of the vanishing summer seemed most potent, Mrs. Ollivant and her daughter-in-law found themselves at Killarney; the solemn mountains closing round them, and shutting out all the busy world beyond; the quiet lakes stretched before them, sunlit, placid, unutterably beautiful; and all the gentle voices of nature crying peace to that troubled heart, where there was no peace.

Dr. Ollivant, who with calm and hidden sway ruled the travellers' movements, had protested against his wife's residence in an hotel. Vain for Mr. Chalfont to assure him that the Killarney hotels are delightful, that in them the visitor could enjoy seclusion the most complete, or the pleasantest society; Dr. Ollivant would have none of them.

"My wife shall go to no place where pleasant society is a possibility," he said grimly. "I don't want her driven into an untimely grave."

Mr. Chalfont sighed, and plaintively reminded the doctor that there were pleasures of the table to be enjoyed at a well-organised *table-d'hôte*, which could hardly be assured in any private establishment. "And the dinners they gave us at Killarney were really most superior," urged the family practitioner.

"Were they worthy of Lucullus or Brillat Savarin, my wife should not eat at a public table," answered Dr. Ollivant decisively. "We must get a cottage somewhere near the lakes."

"I don't think that will be easy," said Mr. Chalfont.

It was not easy; but after a good deal of correspondence, chiefly by telegraph, whereby all waste of time was avoided, Dr. Ollivant heard of a place that appeared suitable. It was a rustic cottage near Muckross, with windows commanding a view of the middle lake—a cottage with a garden where all beautiful things grew with the rich luxuriance common to that favoured soil. Climbing roses covered the gray-stone walls, mountain ashes spread their leafy plumage above the lawn, spicy carnations and mignonette filled the old-fashioned borders, glossy arbutus leaves screened the low house from adverse winds. No more sheltered nook could have been found amidst those romantic scenes.

So far as a mind ill at ease may be charmed with external beauty, Flora was charmed with Killarney. But for the eyes of the sorrowful, all things take one dull dead hue, or else by their brightness and beauty aggravate the keen sense of pain. Just as Flora had felt at Branscomb after Walter's disappearance she felt here. It was so hard to be miserable in a world so full of beauty. Vainly did Mrs. Ollivant, guide-book in hand, expound the features of the scene; vainly endeavour to awaken in her companion that conscientious and painstaking admiration of nature which is the first duty of the tourist. Flora turned her languid eyes from Torc to Mangerton, and did not even know which was which.

"My love," said her mother-in-law seriously, "it is not the least use coming to a place of this kind unless you take the trouble to appreciate the scenery, and at any rate learn the names of the objects around you. You remembered all you saw in Rome—the Colisseum, and Trajan's what's-its-name."

"Yes, mamma, but I was happy then," sighed Flora. "Cuthbert used to read bits of an English Tacitus to me as we sat among the ruins, till Rome seemed peopled with the dead. And we used to talk about Virgil and Horace, and the Rome they knew, before the old gods were dead; and then he would quote that lament of Alfred de Musset's, in *Rolla*. Or he would take out a pocket volume of Shakespeare, and read a

scene from one of the Roman plays. Yes, I was happy then," she concluded with a sigh.

"And you will be happy again," said Mrs. Ollivant. "It is not possible for two people who love each other to remain estranged for ever."

"I *did* love him, mamma. I never knew how well until——"

"Until I discovered him unworthy of my love," she would have said, but left the sentence incomplete, and only ended it with a sigh. She could not speak against the son to the mother—above all to a mother who sacrificed so much out of affection for her.

It was a sleepy kind of existence which the two ladies led in that rustic retreat by the lake. Flora was hardly strong enough, yet, for the regular round of excursions, easy as locomotion is made for the pleasure-seeker at Killarney. She allowed herself to be rowed about the lakes, and appeared to feel a languid pleasure in the slow movement of the boat, the gentle ripple of summer waves, the still beauty of the scene. She would spend long hours with her books on lovely Inisfallen, while Mrs. Ollivant, to whom actual idleness meant martyrdom, worked untiringly at a pair of Berlin-wool slippers for her son—slippers which the unluxurious doctor would permit to adorn his dressing-room, but rarely deign to wear. Here, in this green retreat of the monks of old, Flora would muse over Horace or Hugo, Byron or De Musset, and ever and anon, with bitterest sigh, remember who had taught her to appreciate the greatest authors, and to make other tongues as her own.

Whom did she most regret in these sad hours of secret mourning? The lover her childish fancy had chosen, and whom Fate and evil passions had reft from her untimely, or the husband of her womanhood? Easy to answer that question. Whose image was it that most haunted her? Whose looks and tones recurred with every familiar page, with every favourite passage in her chosen poets? Whose but those of the master and guide who had formed her mind, and filled her dreams with fairest fancies? It was of Cuthbert she thought; it was Cuthbert she mourned. That Cuthbert for whom she had avowed her hatred, from whom she had separated her life for ever. Hard to break a tie that had endured through more than a year of happy married life—a tie that had begun to be woven long before her marriage, in those sad days when she awoke from darkest fever-dreams, in a strange house, and asked Cuthbert Ollivant what had become of her father. From that hour—yes, from the first hour of her orphanhood—he had been all the world to her—his the single all-sustaining love which her weak nature needed; he the deeply-rooted oak upon which

she could hang, poor parasite as she was, in the utter womanliness of her character. Without him her life fell into ruin, or became a mere segment of life, purposeless, meaningless; not life at all, but simply endurance; a dull suffering of days and nights, sunrise and sunset, warmth and cold; existence as mindless and hopeless as that of the cattle on the hill-side, and without their animal joy in living.

Sometimes she would close her book with a short sudden sigh, that was like a stifled sob, and rise from her moss-grown bank, and walk away from the spot where her calm duenna worked little criss-cross stitches with Berlin wool, and put in a few beads here and there, and admired the effect of her labours, and was happy. Flora would wander away in the green solitude, and lean her head against one of the great ash-trunks, and shed secret tears—tears of love and pity and regret—for the husband for whose falsehood she had declared her hatred and her contempt. Bitter were those tears, for they were shed in utter hopelessness.

"If God would let me die!" That was her only prayer. But in spite of hidden tears, of nights that were half unrest, the sweet soft air of Kerry did its work of healing. The languid eyes regained some of their old light, the oval cheek recovered its delicate bloom. As Flora grew stronger, the two ladies wandered farther afield; they climbed Mangerton and looked down upon the glorious panorama of hills and waters; they spent long days on the laurel-shaded banks of that mighty cascade which comes rushing down from the summit of Mangerton; Flora botanising, Mrs. Ollivant steadfast to the slippers. They penetrated the gap of Dunloe, and rode their trusty ponies into the Black Valley; and from the time she first beheld it this lonely vale was Flora's favourite resort. The gloomy grandeur of the scene seemed in harmony with sad thoughts; the solitude soothed her. By degrees, Mrs. Ollivant came to understand that it might be better sometimes to let Flora wander alone, or at least with no other companion than the sturdy guide who led her pony over the rough bits of road, and told her the legends that belonged to every crag and peak. And Mrs. Ollivant, having punctiliously followed the precepts of the guide-book, felt that she had done her duty to Killarney, and in her heart of hearts preferred sitting in the shade of a weeping ash on the lawn, reading her favourite Wordsworth, or grounding dear Cuthbert's slippers, to the more exhausting pleasures that appertain to the worship of nature.

So Flora crossed the lake in a little boat reserved for her especial use, and on the other side found her pony in the charge of a faithful *gossoon*, her liege retainer, and rode thence to the

Black Valley, that awful amphitheatre of hills, which even on the sunniest day has an aspect of all-abiding gloom. Here she would roam at will, while the guide, who was discreet enough to know when he was not wanted, sat on some green knoll and busied himself with the fabrication of salmon flies, being a man of infinite resources. The few inhabitants of that romantic solitude grew to be familiar with the pretty young English lady. The bright-faced girls loved to talk to her, the women brought her goat's milk, the children gathered ferns and wild-flowers for her. The very dogs fawned upon her, and entreated her notice. She was nearer happiness in these lonely rambles than she had ever been since that dreadful June evening at the Willows, when Jarred Gurner revealed her husband's baseness.

Here, in this grand and melancholy scene, her soul rose to its loftier level. That old selfish lament—"He saw my grief, he saw me endure the agony of hope deferred, the sickening tortures of suspense, and he went on deceiving me"—was forgotten. She thought of her husband for the first time with unalloyed pity. He was so far from her, so utterly divided! She could survey his conduct more calmly from this distance. She looked back as to a past life, and saw him with eyes that were no longer passion-blinded. It was for her sake he had sinned. Let her think of him ever so unkindly, she could not quite shut that fact out of her mind. For her sake, to win her love, he had been false to himself. It was not in his nature to stoop, it was not in his nature to deceive; and for her sake he had made himself a liar and a hypocrite. She recalled those moments of gloom which had puzzled and distressed her—dark moods that had stolen upon her husband even in their sunniest hours—depression which he had referred to professional anxieties. She could understand now that he had suffered for his sin; the burden of his falsehood had not sat lightly upon him; all that was noble in his soul had revolted against that one great meanness.

"And it was for my sake," she told herself. Many women would have been proud of such a passion; just as Cleopatra may have been proud when her warrior-lover bartered his glory for her worthless love, and followed her vanishing sails, and told her that worlds won or lost counted less than one tear of hers.

Sometimes Flora thought of her husband with such settled and hopeless sorrow as she might have felt for the very dead—for one whose days and wrongs were done, whose memory only remained to be cherished or despised. But there were other moments, when her fancy pictured him in his lonely life, and her heart ached for his forlornness.

"How strange the house must seem!" she thought, picturing to herself those familiar rooms in Wimpole-street. The Wil-
lows, she knew, was given over to the care of servants; her husband was not likely to go there. "How strange and how lonely that stiff London house must look!—worse than when I first saw it, and wondered at its cold primness—much worse for Cuthbert now that his mother is no longer there to keep him company. He will sit in his consulting-room half through the night, reading those dreadful medical books—English and French and German. What horrid creatures we must be, when so many doctors can find so much to write about our diseases! Poor Cuthbert! It seems such a dreary life. But it is only the same kind of existence he led before papa came home from Australia. It could not matter to him very much; if it were not that we have been so happy." And she remembered those famous lines they two had so often read together:

"Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"She spoke with passion after pause—And were it wisely done
If we who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?
If we whose virtue is so weak should have a will so strong,
And stand blind on the rocks to choose the right path from the wrong?
To choose perhaps a lovelit hearth, instead of love and heaven,—
A single rose, for a rose-tree which beareth seven times seven?
A rose that droppeth from the hand, that fadeth in the breast,
Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best!"

THEY had been more than a month at Muckcross, and the first leaflets of autumn were beginning to fall lightly on the mossy turf, and in the park-like roads where the pine-trees shed their cones on the path. Flora's improved health was an agreeable subject for Mrs. Ollivant to enlarge upon in her letters to her son, and she little dreamed how many a pang she inflicted on the lonely worker when she discoursed of his wife's brightening cheeks, quiet slumbers, and improved spirits. There are wounds whose pain the tenderest touch can only irritate. Reading those cheer-

ful letters in the dull solitude of his consulting-room, by the gray London light, Cuthbert Ollivant thought how shallow a soul this must be, whose griefs mountain scenery and fresh air could cure—how frail the tie which had bound his young wife to him, when its severance left so slight a scar.

"I have prayed God for her happiness," he said to himself afterward, ashamed of his selfish pang. "Am I weak enough to be sorry that my prayer has been heard? Let me think of her tenderly, as the thorn-tree may remember the summer butterfly that floated about its rough branches for a noontide, brightening and beautifying it for a little while, and then soaring away to the flowers."

"Had we not better go back to the Willows, mamma?" Flora asked one morning. "You must be anxious to see that all is right."

She could not bring herself to speak of her husband; but it was of the mother's desire to see her son she was thinking.

"Well, yes, my love, I shall be very glad to see poor Cuthbert again. His letters are so short and so far apart, and altogether so unsatisfactory, that I am naturally rather anxious about him. It is more than a week since I heard last. And then there are the servants at the Willows. It isn't quite a wise thing to leave them alone so long; yet it seems cruel to take you away, while the warm weather lasts, for you seem so fond of the place."

"I do like it very much, mamma; it is so sweet and sad and solitary; but I am ready to go back whenever you please. I wish to obey you, dear mamma; for, believe me," with a broken sob, "I am anxious to make up to you in some small measure for all the sacrifices you have made for me."

"Do not speak of them, dearest. It is true that I should like to be with Cuthbert, but he wishes me to be with you; and I have never thwarted any wish of his. And then I look forward with hope——"

"Do not hope anything for me, mamma; I have done with hope."

"You said the same two years ago, dear, in your grief; yet you have known some happy hours since then."

Flora turned from her with a sigh. It was thus she ended all consolatory arguments. But she did not forget the mother's anxiety to see her son, the housekeeper's concern for her household.

"I believe I am quite well now, mamma," she said; "well enough to satisfy Mr. Chalfont, and to do without his eternal tonics; so we may as well go home as soon as you like."

"Then I'll write to Mary Anne to-day, and see about the packing to-morrow," replied Mrs. Ollivant delightedly.

Packing with her was a solemn business, that occupied at least two days, and demanded serious thought.

The Mary Anne to whom she was going to announce her return was a somewhat antiquated female, who had been housemaid and parlourmaid in the quiet establishment at Long Sutton; one of those household treasures, an old servant.

Flora went out alone that afternoon, for one of her last rambles, more regretful at leaving this tranquil retreat than she would have liked her mother-in-law to know. She had not been happy here; but she had been at peace. There had been nothing to remind her of her past life, with its shifting lights, its dark shadows. To return to the Willows was to go back to the empty husk of her lost happiness. Not an object in that house, which Cuthbert Ollivant had been so glad to adorn for her, but would remind her of how much she had lost in losing him.

Pleasant to open the little gate that led into the sacred precincts of the abbey, unfollowed by the juvenile guardian of the shrine, for whom Flora was a privileged person. How still and calm and holy was that ancient place of tombs, all nature's wildest fairest growth beautifying and sheltering it—deep grass, greenest mosses, gray lichen, ruddy strawberry leaves; the ferns grown tall and rank in their autumnal maturity, the wild honeysuckle exhaling its latest breath in perfume, the berries brightening to deepest red on mountain ash and arbutus, the first yellowing leaves upon poplar and plane, the creeping blue birds-eye stealing in and out among loftier weeds, purple foxgloves lifting their slender spires among the ferns.

Flora moved softly through the deep grass to her favourite nook, awed, no less than on her first entrance here, by the solemn beauty of the scene. She had her chosen spot—a quiet corner of the burial ground—where she could sit for hours, hidden by the angle of a great square tomb, and out of the beat of exploring tourists. The boy who guarded the place knew her retreat, and was careful to keep strangers away from it. She seated herself on a humble mossy old grave beside the loftier tomb, and opened her book—her beloved Dante, almost every page scored and annotated with her husband's pencil. He had taught her Italian out of Dante, just as he had taught her Latin out of Horace. There were his careful notes on the margin of each page, every obscurity made clear, every rugged line made smooth. They had read their favourite pages together in Italy, where climate and landscape lent reality to the verse, and Dante's poem seemed to take new grandeur from Dante's land. To-day she turned the leaves slowly, finding it a hard thing to keep her ideas from wandering far from the page.

"If I had never known the truth I might still have been

happy," she thought, brooding upon that revelation of Jarred Gurner's. She had been so happy just before that evil day, looking forward with unutterable hopes to the time when her baby would smile upon her—when Cuthbert would be proud and glad with the pride and gladness of a father—when all the world would seem brighter for those two, because of the new bright life that would be theirs to cherish and adore. As a child thinks of its first doll, a maiden of her first lover, Flora had thought of the child that was to be given to her arms; and lo, death had claimed the unopened bud, and sent it to blossom in a fairer, holier land.

She closed her volume with a despairing sigh. All the wide world of poetry could not comfort her, or beguile her thoughts from her own little life and its great grief. Francesca and her lover were but empty shadows; and if they had loved and suffered verily in their day she could hardly pity them. Suffering seemed the common lot of humanity. All the horrors of the dreamer's underworld could not awaken her interest. Ugolino was simply a bore. She tossed the book aside impatiently, and gave herself up to musing on her own troubles. What was she to do with that empty remnant of her life, which remained to be got rid of somehow?

The rustle of a woman's dress sweeping over the long grass roused her from this gloomy reverie, after it had lasted some time. She looked up, and saw a lady approaching; young, tall, handsome, and O, so happy-looking—a woman who looked as if her world was all sunshine. She came quickly along, looking about her admiringly, uttering a little exclamation of delight, now and then, involuntarily, for she had no one to whom to communicate her rapture. She was very handsome, quite in a different style from Flora's flower-like beauty; whereby Flora, as was natural, admired her intensely. This stranger was a brunette, with an olive complexion, and eyes that were darker than a starless night. She had a sweet smiling mouth, and white teeth that showed a little between the red slightly-parted lips. She was dressed in soft Indian silk, of a yellowish hue, which harmonised wonderfully with the rich colouring of her somewhat Spanish beauty; and in her gray-felt hat there was a scarlet plume, fastened with a broad silver buckle—just such a hat as one sees in some of Vandyke's portraits. A scarlet shawl—a real Indian fabric—embroidered with gold-coloured silk, hung carelessly upon her shoulders, and a large umbrella of the same material as her dress sheltered her from the sun. In one hand she carried a flat japanned colour-box, and this, to Flora's surprise, she deposited among the strawberry plants and ivy upon the stone tomb. She was going to sketch, evidently; but where

was her sketch-book? Flora watched her movements with languid curiosity. Having laid down her paint-box, the lady looked about her for a minute or so, and then mounted one of the low graves, and looked across the burial-ground, and called, "Toinette, Toinette!" whereupon a shrill voice with a very decided twang responded, "M' voici, m'd'me ! j'viens, m'd'me ;" and then a much smaller voice, also shrill, cried, "Mam—mam—mam—man!" and anon a young person in a neat cambric cap appeared, stumbling over the graves, and through the long grass and brambles, carrying a large portfolio and an artist's camp-stool, and with a very small child—all white and scarlet, like a tropical bird—hanging on to her dress.

"Come to mamma, darling," cried the lady; and presently the little eighteen-months-old toddler was lifted in her strong young arms, and held up in the sunlight, cooing, laughing, joyous, and crying, "'Gain, maman, 'gain!"—meaning that the tossing operation, however fatiguing to the operator, was to be continued until farther notice.

Hot tears welled up into Flora's eyes, and she turned her face against the tomb which concealed her from the strangers, to hide those streaming eyes from the light. Happy mother, happy child! Over her baby's narrow grave the summer flowers had bloomed and faded. She had never held him in her arms, never seen his sweet blue eyes. Why were some people so happy in this world, she asked, and she so miserable? A common question which poor humanity is prone to address to Fate. The camp-stool was provided with a big canvas umbrella; there was also a portable easel, which the lady arranged with extreme care and precision, while the French *bonne* rambled about with the child, showing it the flowers and trees and tombs, with perpetual exclamations in the style of Maguelon and Yveline, in *Nos Bons Villageois*.

"I think that will do," said the lady to herself, after arranging and rearranging the easel, and shifting the big umbrella two or three times.

"What a fuss she makes about her things," thought Flora; "she ought to be a very great artist for her sketches to be worth all this preparation."

But the lady made no sign of beginning work. She walked in and out among the low graves, looked at the view from every point, paused to survey her preparations, smiled approvingly.

"I think he will like this spot," she murmured. "That angle of the abbey stands out so well against the foliage. What a lovely background for one of his subjects! He might paint as good a picture as Millais' *Huguenots*; just two lovers meeting or parting in front of yonder ruined wall, and every

bit of lichen and ivy on that old tomb standing sharply out in the clear air."

"O," thought Flora, "all these preparations are for some one else—her husband perhaps."

She thought of the brief happy days at Branscomb, in that bygone life of hers, when she too had busied herself with a painter's paraphernalia, and arranged the pencils and dabbled with the colours belonging to that Raffaele in embryo, Mr. Walter Leyburne.

"How foolish I was in those days!" she mused, pitying her fond girlish delusions; "and if that old woman told the truth, he never really cared for me. Poor papa almost asked him to propose to me, I daresay;" blushing hotly at the humiliating idea.

And then she thought of that young lover's awful death; hurled in one moment from the sunlight and glory of this world to tragic instantaneous death; horrible death, perchance; for who could tell what endurance of agony might not be concentrated in that awful moment? The sun shining on the smiling summer fields, the skylark carolling in heaven's unclouded vault; and below that bright glad world the awful illimitable gulf men call the grave.

"How could my husband ever be happy, remembering that hour?" she wondered. "How could he ever feel himself less than a murderer?"

She lapsed into gloomy thought, and forgot the strange lady, who, after fluttering about a little, now here, now there, disappeared from that corner of the burial-ground, leaving the easel and umbrella ready for the coming worker. Flora looked up presently, slightly curious about any lover of that art she loved so well. She thought of her own portfolios and sketching-gear, lying idle in her pretty morning-room at the Willows. She had not touched pencil or brushes since that cruel hour when the bright thread of life was broken. Old pursuits could delight her no longer; life's joy-bells were out of tune. Yet she was too much an artist in her small way to behold that easel and colour-box without some faint interest, and she watched for the coming of the painter.

"I don't think I should ever have cared for him if he hadn't been a painter," she mused, remembering how her interest in the young stranger in the velvet coat had first been aroused, in the far-away time when she used to look out of the window in Fitzroy-square, that stony dreary quadrangle which to her fancy was the finest square in London.

A footfall came softly across the deep grass, the odour of a choice havannah polluted the sweet flower-scented air. The artist was approaching.

She looked up curiously from her snug retreat in the angle made by the tomb and low fern-fringed wall. He too wore a velvet coat. It was the custom of the painter tribe evidently. He too had a silky moustache of palest acburn; she could just see the drooping ends under the broad brim of his Panama hat. He wore a short Vandyke beard. He was tall and slim, and youthful of aspect, with long white feminine hands, an onyx cameo on one finger, a cornelian intaglio on the other. Her face grew white as the cotton-flowers in the Black Valley, the fleecy blossoms that whiten the marshy grounds, like snow in summer. The stranger—whose face she had not seen yet—had a carriage and manner that turned her blood to ice. So like the dead—so like the dead! Yet why should not two young men resemble each other in figure and bearing? There was nothing extraordinary in the resemblance; but it gave her an awful feeling, as if the returning dead had drawn near her under the bright blue sky. She could hardly breathe. She felt that horrid sense of oppression which seizes upon the sleeper in a nightmare dream; felt that she wanted to cry aloud, and could not for her very life. The stranger lingered a little before he came to the easel, looked about him admiringly, considering, as the lady had done; mounted a lowly grave and surveyed the scene, with that indifference to the sanctity of graves which marks the tourist; walked about a little, exploring, meditating, and then began to sing to himself softly in a tender tenor voice—a voice that had a faint touch of that veiled tone with which Sims Reeves strikes the fountain of our tears, the one exquisitely pathetic voice, which to have heard but once is to remember for ever. He sang the “*Donna è Mobile*,” singing as he strolled from tomb to tomb, with just that debonnâir tone in which Mario used to troll the melody as he sauntered gaily across the bridge, leaving death and ruin behind him. At the sound of that familiar air, Flora began to tremble violently. She drew closer to the tomb, clung to it, as if there were succour and defence from some unfathomable horror even in that stony shelter.

“If the dead could come back,” she thought; “if it were possible, or if it were possible that man had deceived me! But no, Cuthbert acknowledged it. My husband confessed his part in Walter’s death. It is only a likeness in voice, and in walk and figure!”

She paused, breathless, and wiped the cold perspiration from her forehead. Greater terror she could hardly have known had the dead verily appeared to her. She thought of Lazarus, and of that unspeakable awe which must have fallen upon his sisters when they saw their dead come forth at his Master’s summons.

"The voice—the voice!" she thought, as those tender notes floated away on the soft air. "It is his very tone—his favourite melody. How often I have heard him sing, just like that, as he stooped over my shoulder to correct a line in my drawing, without knowing that he was singing!"

The stranger completed his survey, and sauntered up to the tomb, opened his colour-box, still singing to himself in an undertone, and arranged his sheaf of brushes, his pallet, his tubes; and then, when all was ready, tossed his hat into the ferns and briars.

Then, bareheaded, he bent over the tomb for the last time, to take up his pallet before seating himself under the umbrella; and as he did so Flora lifted her white face above the edge of the tomb and looked at him.

It was Walter Leyburne.

She gave a fearful cry, and fell face downwards in the long grass.

He had not seen the small white face looking at him over the ivy and lichen and strawberry leaves, and was so much the more startled by that agonised shriek, which seemed to come from the earth.

"Is it mandrake?" he thought; "the soul of the murdered crying out against his assassin?"

He looked about him—saw the fallen figure in its white dress, dashed across a grave or two, and lifted the lifeless form in his arms.

"A nice situation," he said to himself, "burdened with an unconscious stranger! Loo! Toinette!"

No one answered his call. He stood in helpless perplexity for a few moments, not having the faintest idea what he ought to do for the sufferer. She hung motionless in his arms, her face turned towards his shoulder.

There was no restorative at hand but the sweet fresh 'mountain air—not a beck or pool within ten minutes' walk; so, faintly remembering something that a doctor had once told him, he laid the lifeless stranger gently down on the soft long grass, with her pale face turned upward to the smiling sky. Then for the first time he saw and recognised that unforgotten face.

"Flora!" he cried.

The heavy white lids were slowly lifted, as if life came back at his bidding; the melancholy blue eyes looked at him dreamily for a moment, as sense returned to the bewildered brain and then the lips faltered:

"Am I dead too, and in the land of death?"

The painter watched her with a guilty look as she slowly

raised herself from that soft couch among the low graves, and tottered back to her favourite seat by the ivy-shrouded tomb.

"Flora," he said, "forgive me!"

"Forgive you!" she echoed, looking at him dreamily; "forgive you—for what?"

"For having suffered you to believe me dead. I must seem a coward in your sight—a hypocrite—all that is low and mean; but I have been the creature of circumstances. When you know all, you will acknowledge that."

"I want to know nothing," she answered with dignity, "except that my husband is guiltless of your blood. I have made him suffer—have suffered myself—a world of agony for your sake."

She looked at him wonderingly. He seemed to have lost the grace and glory that had once surrounded him like a halo. He seemed of a different clay from the lover of her girlhood. Handsome still, graceful still, with not one attribute of his youth changed or lessened—yet not the same. The glamour was gone for ever.

"What motive had you for leaving me under such a miserable delusion about you?" she asked passionately, remembering all the anguish of the last few months. "Why did you make a good man suffer years of wasted remorse for your sake?"

"The good man, having knocked me down on the edge of a precipice, had some right to his share of compunction," answered Walter Leyburne, coolly. "If my reticence caused *you* any pain, Flora, I am deeply sorry."

"You were my betrothed husband," she answered. "In all the world I had only you, and my father, and Dr. Ollivant, whose friendship I had not learned to value. You were half my world in those days, and the mystery that surrounded your fate made it all the more terrible. Yes, Mr. Leyburne, you made *me* suffer more than my share of agony."

"Flora, forgive me! Look at me, on my knees at your feet," he pleaded, kneeling beside her, clasping the small cold hands. "I did not know what I was doing. For months I lay between life and death; and then came a time in which mind and memory were little better than a blank. When I came back to life and the waking world, and had power to communicate with you, we two had been parted nearly a year. I reasoned the matter out, and told myself that whatever natural sorrow you might have suffered for my fate was over and done with. Little good could come of your knowing the truth at that late hour. And then when I next heard of you, you were married to Dr. Ollivant."

"Did not honesty to him constrain you to declare the truth, putting me out of the question?"

"I owed no allegiance to him. We fought, and he gave me a blow that just missed being mortal. I had no compunction about him. I had had my share of suffering—concussion of the brain, months of dangerous illness. I had just narrowly escaped insanity. Do you suppose that I should be particularly anxious about *his* feelings?"

"Well, you have had your revenge," said Flora, with a sigh. "You have parted me from the best husband that ever woman had. How can I tell if he will take me back again—if he will ever forgive me all the hard things I said of him for your sake? My life has been twice darkened for your sake. Once when I grieved for your unknown fate, and now again when I was taught to believe my husband guilty of your death. No life could have been happier than mine was when that knowledge came upon me, and I flung it all away—for your sake."

"Easy to win all back again," said Walter, with a touch of that old lightness which had been a charm in the past, an attribute of that careless sunny nature which had seemed so bright and fair to the girl's fancy. It jarred upon the woman now. "Easy to reclaim his love; he is too devoted to you to be angry."

Flora sighed, and was doubtful. She knew the depth of that soul whose love she had outraged. True that her husband's sin of suppression and hypocrisy was not lessened by the fact that his rival lived. Yet she saw all things in a new light now that the man she had mourned as dead stood before her, mere clay after all, and not an awful and sacred memory. The gulf between life and death is not wider than the difference between our estimation of the living and the dead. Sublimated by death the man rises to the hero, the poet soars to the god.

Not once did Flora question her sometime lover about his past. She felt very sure that the dark-eyed lady who had arranged the sketching-gear was his wife, the little butterfly creature in white and scarlet his child. He had chosen his lot in paths removed from hers, and had kept aloof from her rather than confess the bitter truth that he had never loved her; that his engagement to her was an entanglement from which he gladly withdrew himself. All this seemed clear enough to her, and she had no desire to know more. All her thoughts and fears and hopes centred in the faithful husband from whom she had been parted for this man's sake.

She rose, with an effort, and walked a little way from the tomb, Walter by her side, offering support to those feeble steps.

"Thanks, I shall be stronger presently," she said; "I am going home. It is not far; a nice little shady walk, that is all. Good afternoon, Mr. Leyburne."

"But I cannot think of letting you go alone," he said. "You live near here, then?"

"Yes; I am staying with my mother-in-law at a cottage near here."

"You are quite at home in the place, then. We—I—only arrived last night."

"You and your wife and child," said Flora; "I saw them just now."

"Yes," he answered, with a guilty look, "my wife and I. Flora, if you will only let me tell you everything—explain everything that has happened since that day at Branscomb—I am sure you would think better of me."

"What is the use of explanations?" asked Flora. "No explanation will give me back my happy life, or make my husband forget my cruelty to him. Let things be as they are. I knew long ago, when I first mourned for your supposed death, that you had never cared for me."

"That is not true, Flora. I did care for you—who could know you without loving you?—only——"

"Only you loved some one else better," interrupted Flora. "I heard all that."

"From whom, in Heaven's name?"

"An old—an elderly person called upon me—a Mrs. Gurner."

"What, she had the impertinence to intrude upon you!" cried Walter indignantly, and with a flush of shame upon cheek and brow, for there are alliances a man scarcely cares to remember.

"Do not be angry with her. She seemed to pity my wasted grief. She told me that you had been attached to some granddaughter of hers. Your wife, I suppose."

"Yes. But you must not form your opinion of my wife from that horrid old woman. My wife is full of intelligence and brightness, and has a natural refinement that needed very little to develop it. She has been—but I could never reckon the sum of her devotion. She has given me the most unselfish love that man ever was blessed with. You will learn to forgive me when you know how much I owe her—life itself—and better than life, reason; for nothing less than her ceaseless care could have restored either. I only gave her the life I owed to her affection."

"I do not grudge her the prize," returned Flora coldly. "I only regret that you did not think it worth while to let me know that you were safe and happy, and had formed new ties, and that I might be happy for my part. It would not have been much to do."

Walter was silent for a little, and then said humbly:

"Those who had the care of me in my day of darkness should have communicated with you. It seemed too late afterwards. Nay, I confess the truth. I was coward enough to fear your contempt for my inconstancy—your scorn of my humble marriage. It seemed easier to let things glide. I left England on my wedding-day, and only returned late last June, since when my wife and I have been travelling in Scotland and the Lake district. We only came to Ireland a few days ago. After learning Italy by heart, we wanted to know the beauties of our native land."

"And your fame?" said Flora; "I wonder that has not told me you were not dead. You must be a great painter by this time."

"Alas, no," he answered with a smile and a sigh; "greatness is not easily made out of such stuff as I. Yet I have worked honestly in the past two years. My wife has urged me to that, having grand ideas about my future. I sent a little *tableau de genre* to the last Parisian Exhibition, which was very well spoken of, and that is the first small leaflet I have gathered towards the crown of laurel I am to win some day. I signed my picture *Espoir*, so that even if you had seen it criticized you would have been no wiser. Nor would you be likely to hear of me from friends or acquaintance. My wife and I have wandered from place to place, unknown and unnoticed. We have lived only for ourselves, courting no society, and following our own whims and fancies, Bohemians as we are."

They had been walking slowly away from the abbey precincts all this time, along the shady road that led to the cottage. At the gate of the small domain they parted, with coldest courtesy on Flora's part, with solicitous regard on Walter's.

"We are to be friends in future, are we not, Flora?" he asked pleadingly, detaining the hand that touched his so coldly.

"Friends at a distance," she answered. "It could not give you any pleasure to meet my husband. I thank God for your preservation upon that dreadful day. I wish you and you wife all happiness that life can give you; but I would rather our lives remained far apart. The memory of the past is bitter for all of us. God bless you, Walter!" she said warmly, with a new kindness in her face, "God bless you and yours, and good-bye!"

"That means forgiveness, doesn't it, Flora?"

"Yes. For the sake of the love that is dead, for my father's sake, who loved you so well, and as I hope to be forgiven for my sins."

"Now you have made me happy, Flora. Good-bye."

He pressed the little hand, bent down to kiss it, and left her.

"Mamma," said Flora, going into the shady little parlour where Mrs. Ollivant was busily engaged in a great work of accountancy, going over all the Killarney bills, and comparing them with her household ledger,—*"mamma, is it to-morrow we are going away?"*

"No, my love. Don't you remember that we arranged for the day after? I gave you a couple of days to say good-bye to your favourite walks."

"Could we go to-morrow, mamma?"

"Do you wish it?"

"Very much. With all my heart."

"What a capricious child! Well I think it might be done—if I were to sit up for an hour or two to-night and work at the packing."

"Let me help you, mamma. I should like it of all things."

"Do you think I would let you fatigue yourself? Why, how white you are looking, Flora!" exclaimed Mrs. Ollivant, lifting her eyes from those all-absorbing papers; "worse than I have seen you look for a long time. Lie down on the sofa, dear, till I bring you your afternoon cup of tea. You have been over-tiring yourself."

"No, mamma, there is nothing the matter with me. But I want to get back to London. I want to see my husband, for I think, if Heaven will be kind to us, we may be happy again. If Cuthbert can but forgive me!"

"Forgive you, child! He has no thought but of your happiness. Though I do not know the cause of your quarrel, I know what he has suffered. There is no measure or limit to his love."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Du lieber Gott! was so ein Mann
 Nicht alles alles denken kann!
 Beschämt nur steh' ich vor ihm da,
 Und sag' zu allen Sachen ja.
 Bin doch ein arm unwissend Kind;
 Begreife nicht was er an mir find't."

"Poor men's smoky cabins are not always porticoes of moral philosophy."

THREE years ago, a young man had lain staring at the white summer light shining through a square latticed window opposite his bed. The room in which he lay was the merest cottage chamber, with nothing to recommend it as a shelter for the humblest tenant, except spotless cleanliness. The worm-eaten old boards had been scrubbed to relentless purity, the white-wash showed no smirch or stain. No lurking cobweb clouded the corners of the ceiling. An ancient tent bedstead, with scanty dimity curtains and patchwork coverlet, nearly filled the room, leaving just enough space for an arm-chair between bed and wall, and a rickety old triangular washstand in a corner. A row of scarlet geraniums in flower-pots on the window-ledge brightened the room within, and embellished the cottage without. It was a cabin in a little fishing village, about four miles from Branscomb in Devon—one of a straggling row of such cabins built just on the edge of the rough low beach, sheltered from land winds by the rugged crumbling red-clay cliffs that rose irregularly behind it. And these eight or nine fishermen's huts, with a little low thatched public-house, comprised the village of Liddlecomb. Here the young man lay, week after week, through the cloudless summer weather, not able even to see the bright blue water in his recumbent position, but staring at the square of summer sky, which faded and went out into darkness sometimes, and at other times struggled slowly back to light and brightness again. A little elderly man, a general practitioner of Long Sutton, came to the cabin in his gig three times a week, to see this helpless watcher of the changing light; came into the room, and sat in the arm-chair by the bed, and felt the young man's pulse, watch in hand, while the old woman of the cottage stood by waiting his instructions. This process was repeated regularly, and with but the slightest altera-

tion. Sometimes the old doctor shook his head despondently, sometimes he murmured that things were looking a little better.

"It's wearing work," said the fisherman's old wife; "I'm paid to do my duty by him, and I do it, but it's wearing work."

By-and-by came a deeper darkness, in which even that patch of summer sky seen through the diamond-paned lattice ceased to be. At best it had been meaningless for the patient, but his eyes had seen it, and been dimly conscious of its changes. In this profounder night of unconsciousness light was not; but from this dark abyss his soul struggled upward to a new world.

One day—one never-to-be-forgotten moment in his life—he became conscious of a soft voice murmuring near him, a gentle hand laid upon his brow. That rough horny hand of the old woman's had been a torment to him many a time, when he had no power to discern the nature of the thing that troubled him. He lifted his tired eyelids, and looked up and saw a dark face, with softly-shining eyes looking down at him. A glass was held to his lips, and he drank a deep and long draught of some sharp cold drink; a draught that seemed to him like the wine of life. Then without a touch of wonder, he gently murmured, "Loo," and closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Day after day the same tender hands ministered to him, the same loving eyes watched him. But his own state was full of change. Sometimes he recognized his nurse; sometimes all was blank; sometimes there came fits of violence, when the old fisherman and his wife had to come to the nurse's aid. Yet, through all, that faithful watcher knew no weariness. Untired, devoted, she gave all that love and fidelity can give, without stint and without measure.

This was how Walter Leyburne struggled slowly back to life, after that fall from the top of the cliff. It had not been quite so bad a fall as it seemed to the agonized spectator above. The loose rough clay had broken under his feet, and a mass of it had fallen with him, breaking his fall, so that he rather slipped down the steeply sloping face of the cliff than fell from top to bottom. When Jarred Gurner found him he was breathing heavily, unconscious; there were bones broken too, but the spine was uninjured. Jarred's shifty brains at once took in the chances of profit involved in the situation. The man might die or he might recover. If he died, what a hold Jarred's knowledge of the circumstances of his death would give him upon the doctor; provided the doctor were weak enough to shrink from the bold avowal of his act! If Walter Leyburne recovered, on the other hand, a little clever manœuvring might win a rich

husband for Loo. Jarred had aimed at that when he shut his daughter out of doors, counting upon the impulsive generosity of a hot-headed young man, too much in love to be worldly wise. Of the issue of that hazard Jarred was still ignorant, when he found Walter Leyburne at Branscomb; but here was the young man fallen into his hands, and it would be strange if he failed this time. All these considerations flashed through his mind as he knelt beside the fallen man, and when he met Dr. Ollivant a few minutes afterwards, his scheme was decided upon, his snare was ready.

It was more difficult to provide for the bestowal of his charge; but this he did in the boldest and simplest manner. He watched for the first fishing-boat that sailed within earshot of the shore, and hailed her, vainly at first, as the crew paid no attention to his call, but after a little they seemed to think better of it, and brought their boat in to the beach. She was the smallest of craft, with only an old man and a boy on board her. On her bows was painted, in white letters, "*Snowdrop*, Liddlecomb, J. Burgess," an inscription which was useful to Mr. Gurner.

"My son has had a fall, and hurt his head a bit," said Jarred, going close up to the boat; "if you'll take him as far as Liddlecomb for me, I'll make it better worth your while than fishing for the next hour or two."

The old man scratched his gray head, and protested his willingness to earn whatever the stranger might give him.

"Was it much of a fall, mister?" he asked, with friendly interest.

"No, not much; but he fell on his head, you see, and that made it awkward. Come on shore and give me a hand with him, lad," said Jarred to the fisherboy, who was helping his grandfather to pull in the boat.

Jarred and the boy were both strong, and carried Walter Leyburne easily enough between them for fifty yards or so from the bottom of the cliff to the boat. Here they laid him carefully on an old sail at the bottom of the weather-beaten bark, and then the fisherman and his lad trimmed their sail for Liddlecomb. Nothing could have been more neatly done, Jarred thought. No one had seen the transaction; this man and boy need be his only confederates, and these two simple creatures would believe any story he chose to tell them.

"He looks mortal bad," said J. Burgess of Liddlecomb, glancing down at the white blank face lying on the brown sail-cloth. "He looks like death."

"Yes, his head is hurt, poor fellow; but he'll come round after a bit, I daresay. He's young and strong."

"How did it happen, mister?"

"Well, he was climbing up a bit of that craggy red clay to look at a bird's nest or something—I was lying on the beach half asleep, and not paying any attention to him—and he lost his footing, I suppose, and slipped backwards. He must have alien on his head, anyhow. He was quite insensible when I found him; and there's an arm broken, I'm afraid."

"A bad job. You're strangers in these parts, I suppose?"

"Yes; I was never in Devonshire before. We were stopping at an inn at Long Sutton, but I hardly like the notion of taking my son so far, or to such a noisy place. Do you know of any decent house in Liddlecomb where I could get him accommodated?"

The fisherman scratched his head again meditatively, and then said, with diffidence:

"My old woman has a room she lets, when she can. It's clean and it's comfortable—there's a feather-bed that belonged to my grandmother—and perhaps that's as much as any one could say for it."

"I shouldn't wonder if it would suit very well," replied Jarred, who sat in the bottom of the boat by the lifeless figure lying on the sail-cloth. "Your missus would look after this poor fellow, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, I reckon she could. She hasn't much to do except keep her place clean, and she does that with a will."

"And Liddlecomb is a quiet place, I daresay?"

"It wouldn't be easy to make much noise there; there isn't a dozen houses altogether, and them fishermen's cottages."

"Just the very place for a sick man. Could I get any doctor to come so far?"

"Mr. Polford does come over sometimes from Long Sutton. He's doctor for our parish."

"We could get him to set my son's arm, then. I think, Mr. Burgess, if your room is really clean and comfortable it might suit us."

This was how Walter Leyburne came to the fisherman's cabin at Liddlecomb. He was carried up to the small whitewashed chamber that bright June evening, while Flora was watching at Branscomb for his return. It was late in August when he awoke from the long night of delirium and unconsciousness, and found Loo watching by his bed.

From that time he was hers, and hers only. His love for her never wavered. He turned to her in his helplessness as a child turns to its mother's breast, almost with the same pure and perfect affection. Her presence seemed to bring him healing and life. His mind, only half recovered from the shock it had

experienced, remained for some time in a state of comparative weakness. Memory was but faintly awakened; the past seemed dim and remote; but one fact he was very sure of, and that was his love for Louisa Gurner. His most ardent desire—indeed, the one thought of his mind—was to make her his wife. He would have had their wedding-day earlier by three months than it was; it was Loo's insistence only that deferred it. Her father urged the folly of such obstinacy.

"Really, Louisa, you are the most pigheaded girl I ever met with," Mr. Gurner exclaimed indignantly. "Here have you been devoting yourself to this young man for the last four months, till you're worn to a threadpaper, and now, when he naturally wants to make you the only return he can by marrying you, you put your back up, and talk of waiting. Waiting for what, I should like to know?"

"For Walter's mind to be restored, father. He is not in his right mind yet; life seems like a dream to him, and because I have nursed him and been with him so long, he fancies he cannot live without me. Let us be parted for a little while, and when his mind is quite strong again, if he still wishes to marry me, I shall be proud and happy to be his wife."

Loo had her way. She did not go back to Voysey-street, but to a quiet little school at Exeter, where among friendly, simple-minded people, she contrived to improve herself steadily and swiftly. Jarred would not lose sight of his future son-in-law. He and Walter went to Switzerland together, and dawdled away three months among mountains and valleys, and on the margin of vast blue lakes. The London Bohemian felt curiously out of place among the sublimities of nature; the painter let his days slip by him in dreamy idleness, disinclined to begin active life again, all youthful yearnings for distinction fallen asleep, and with but one aspiration remaining to him—the desire for reunion with Loo. He counted the days of their severance, and looked forward to her letters as the one delight of his life; and Loo's letters, despite her imperfect education, were worth having; there was such freedom of expression, such life and individuality in them; and then every letter was a deification of that young gentleman dawdling through the slow autumn hours by the Genevese lake; every letter paid him divine honours, as it were, and gratified vanity and flattered self-love added sweetness to the girl's frank careless lines.

When the three months were over Walter's improvement almost warranted Jarred in announcing his complete recovery. The two men went back to England, to the grave old city of Exeter, where Walter Leyburne and Louisa Gurner were in due course quietly married, no one who knew them being present at

the ceremony, save Jarred. They left England on their wedding-day, to wander at will through all the fairest scenes of Europe—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot;" Walter perfectly happy in the companionship of a wife who worshipped him.

Little by little the mind so nearly wrecked regained its old vigour, and Walter Leyburne awoke to the consideration of how mean a part he had played, and how weak a dupe he had been in the hands of Jarred Gurner. But no consideration that ever arose with him lessened his regard for Loo, or his belief in her truth; that never wavered; no baseness of her father's could degrade her in his eyes. He remembered how she had refused to be his wife when she stood houseless and friendless by his side, loving him as she loved him now; how she had rejected him a second time when her care and tenderness had brought him back to life; how honestly and faithfully she had stood her ground, and insisted that he should have ample time for deliberation before he took the fatal step. Jarred was pensioned liberally, and told to forget as much as possible that he had a daughter; to which stern decree Loo added a tearful postscript to the effect that she should always remember and love her father, and would come to see him whenever she came to England. Many a tender letter did Loo write to that faulty father in the years of separation that followed her marriage.

In Venice, Walter read the announcement of Dr. Ollivant's marriage.

"How easily such wounds are healed!" he cried, with a cynical laugh. "You thought she would break her heart about me, Loo."

"I should have broken my heart if I had lost you," replied that devotee, with an adoring look.

"And yet you seemed willing to lose me, Loo, for you refused me twice."

"I did not want you to pick me up out of the gutter, for mere pity sake," she answered, "only because I loved you so much."

"If all men could pick up such pearls out of poverty's gutter, life would be happier than it is, Loo," said her husband, proudly.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Now t the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
 When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
 When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
 And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
 Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
 From death to life thou mightst him yet recover."

NEVER did a given number of miles seem longer to the impatient traveller than the distance between Killarney and London seemed to Flora, as she journeyed homewards, eager, beyond all measure of eagerness, to make atonement to that sinner for whom she had been so implacable a judge three little months ago.

Dr. Ollivant's sin, his tacit falsehood, his long-sustained hypocrisy, was in no wise lessened by the fact of his rival's escape from the jaws of death. The doctor's part in this business remained exactly what it had been before. Yet Flora hastened back to England to forgive him—nay more, to entreat his forgiveness for her unkindness. But then women are rarely logical; the exacter sciences, in all their rigid angularity, have no place in the soft curves of a woman's nature. Walter Leyburne dead had been a central figure in the fair picture of the past, a memory fraught with grief, a bright and faultless shade; but Walter Leyburne living, and, by his own showing, guilty either of supreme moral cowardice or utter indifference to her feelings, was quite another person. She compared his conduct with her husband's, weighed the fickleness of one against the changeless constancy of the other, and naturally gave the preference to the man who had sinned for her sake, rather than to the man who had sinned against her. There was as deep a falsehood in Walter's offer of his love to her that summer day at Branscomb, while his heart was in reality given to his low-born enchantress, as ever there had been in Cuthbert Ollivant's concealment of his part in his rival's supposed death. And of the two falsehoods, it was easier to Flora to forgive the falsehood of the faithful lover.

Nor was this all. It is more than possible that, in the secret chamber of her heart, she had forgiven her husband even before Walter's resurrection. Pity, and yearning, and tenderness, and remorse for hard words spoken, had been struggling in that

womanly breast with a truthful woman's scorn of untruth. Smouldering love needed but the lightest spark to kindle into a flame; and, lo, kindly Providence had given her an excuse for pardon. She would go back to him and say, "Be happy again, repentant sinner; the accident in which foolish passion involved you was not fatal. Your rival lives; no more a rival, and never in his brightest hour worthy to be measured against so true a lover."

All through the autumn night—in the sea-passage between Waterford and Milford Haven—Flora lay awake, listening to the monotonous chorus of the waves, and thinking of the meeting to which she was journeying. She pictured the scene to herself, conjuring up the lonely figure that had haunted her among the ash-groves of Inisfallen, amidst the silence of the Black Valley. She thought of her husband sitting alone in that grave library to which she had gone so often in quest of some favourite author, stealing gently in upon his studious reverie, and seeing him look up startled, but always pleased at her coming, always willing to close his book, and come to her assistance, to advise, to enlighten, to amuse her. Sweet stolen half-hours of companionship in the midst of the busy professional day, should she ever know their pleasantness again? It was only in looking back at them that she had discovered how precious they were.

She pictured him as he would be at midday to-morrow, when she had come to the end of her journey, and stole in upon him unannounced, just as in the days of her happy wifehood. She fancied him sitting at his desk, surrounded by his usual litter of books and papers, reading one of the medical journals in some pause of his day's labour, and how, at the sound of her footstep, he would look up with his calm professional expression, just gently sympathetic, as who should say, 'What new traveller on the ash-strewed way to death has made my house his halting-place?' And she had fancied how, seeing it was no common patient, but his repentant wife, who had entered his room, he would start up from his chair, doubtful perhaps for a moment how he should receive her, and then, instantly subjugated by love's old witchery, open wide his arms and fold her to his heart. O, sweet, sweet, sweet hour! never again would she run the hazard of eternal banishment from that fond shelter.

But what if imagination's picture were unrealized? What if he, so strong to love, should prove himself as powerful in his resentment? What if he should greet her with aversion's stony look, point a stern finger to the door, and say, 'Henceforward our homes are apart—I have no longer a wife?'

These two pictures—one, perhaps, just as likely to be a fore-

cast of the truth as the other—haunted the sleepless traveller all through that night of fever and unrest. Such a prolonged agony of hope and doubt and fear was concentrated in those few hours, that brief as the night was on board the swift steamer it seemed almost endless to this anxious traveller.

She was surprised on landing at Milford to discover that night was still “at odds with morning which was which.” Faint gleams of dawning light, pale and sickly, struggled with the yellower glare of the lamps in the great empty station.

“I hope you slept well, my love,” said Mrs. Ollivant, who had caught the green hue of the waves in her transit, and was crushed and faded of aspect as if by the passage of years, instead of six or eight hours at sea. “I know what a good sailor you are, and that you can sleep on board a steamer;” this with a plaintive sigh.

“No, mamma, I couldn’t sleep much; I had so many things to think about. But I hope you were not ill,” added Flora sympathetically, sea-sickness being inscribed in unmistakable characters upon the elder lady’s brow.

“My dear, I was in the hands of Providence,” replied Mrs. Ollivant gravely, “and the stewardess was very attentive. But there was one period of the night when I felt that if we had gone to the bottom it would not have signified much to me.”

Through those chill gleams of new-born day, unattractive of aspect, like most newly created things, the travellers sped onward, across the hilly Welsh country, at first open and pastoral—a sheep country evidently—and anon to districts famous for coal and iron, where the earth was overhung with a smoky pall, and a general blackness and grimness pervaded everything; past English cathedral cities and obscure manufacturing towns; leaving the hills behind, and with them the romance and charm of the landscape; into the verdant rural home counties with their somewhat tea-board prettiness; by the rushy river that winds below the gentle slopes of Caversham, across the bridge that spans the same bright river by pleasant Maidenhead—favourite resort of the tired Londoner—and so onward till the clear autumn air thickens over the multitudinous roofs of the mighty city.

They were at Paddington—Mrs. Ollivant looking a monument of Neptune’s inhumanity; Flora pale as death, but with a bright resolute look in eye and lip.

“Mamma,” she said, in a quick decided way, a few minutes before they reached the terminus, “you take a cab and the luggage, and drive across to Waterloo, and go on to Teddington by the first train that will take you there. I know how anxious you are about the house.”

"But you'll come with me, won't you, Flora?"

"No, mamma, I shall drive straight to Wimpole-street, to Cuthbert. If all goes well, I shall persuade him to come to

"Willows with me in time for dinner. If we do not come by that time, you may know that he has refused to forgive me. But in that case I shall come home alone, most likely."

"My dear child, how can you doubt his forgiveness? He has never blamed you in my hearing. He has always taken all blame upon himself."

"It is his nature to be generous," answered Flora gravely. "I do not say that he has been altogether blameless, but I have been too hard in judging the one error of his life. I have forgotten how much I owe him, what manifold reasons I have for gratitude, and indulgence, and love."

"Go to him, dear, and be assured of his forgiveness. I shall look forward anxiously for your arrival at the Willows. Dinner at seven, I suppose, as usual? And I will take care to have everything nice," added Mrs. Ollivant, full of maternal solicitude, and not a little agitated by the prospect of reconciliation between those two whom she loved so well; yet anxious withal upon the question of fish and the possibilities of partridges. These sordid material things have their influence upon the spiritual half of existence, mind and matter being curiously interwoven in our lower nature. A good dinner is not without its function in domestic life, and an offended husband is more prone to the melting mood after soles *au maître d'hôtel* and a well-roasted partridge than after the frugal housewife's leg of mutton and caper-sauce.

So the two ladies took separate cabs at Paddington terminus; Mrs. Ollivant driving to Waterloo, under a perilous mountain of portmanteaus, Flora to Wimpole-street.

How slowly the rumbling old four-wheeled cab drove! It was such a little way, yet the first half of the journey seemed long. But when she saw the familiar Marylebone-road and the well-known street-corners, Flora's heart grew heavy with an awful fear, and she would gladly have lengthened the distance between her and the home she had so longed to reach. The cab turned into Wimpole-street with many a jolt and groan. There were the two rows of monotonous houses staring each other out of countenance, the whitened doorsteps, the shining brass-plates on professional doors, the balcony boxes, with their scarlet geranium and fading mignonette, the plate-glass windows and invariable draperies—crimson damask below, white muslin above—here a birdcage, there a man or maid-servant looking out, like Sisera's mother at her lattice—and then Flora's heart gave a great thump, as the cab, after plunging uncer-

tainly at the kerbstone once or twice, came to a standstill opposite Dr. Ollivant's door.

His house looked the dingiest in the street. The doorsteps had been neglected—those broad expanses of stone which had once been of spotless whiteness, which had been hearthstoned twice a day, if need were, under Mrs. Ollivant's firm rule. There were straws and shreds of London rubbish in the corners; the brass-plate was dull; the geraniums in the dining-room window-boxes were languishing for lack of water; the half-drawn blinds hung awry. Desolation was imprinted upon the house front—for the fronts of houses have their unmistakable language.

Flora's heart sank at the aspect of her old home. The change was her fault. She had robbed her husband of the faithful housewife who had made his home bright and pleasant for him; for her selfish pleasure Mrs. Ollivant had deserted the post of duty, and left her son homeless. A neglected house is no home.

The factotum opened the door as usual; but even he had an air of having run to seed. He wore his morning jacket of striped linen, instead of the respectable black which it had been his wont to assume ere this hour of the day, and the jacket looked limp and dirty. The man himself had a haggard look, as of one who had kept late hours.

Flora said not a word, but crossed the hall to the consulting-room, opened the door, and went in; heedless of whether she might interrupt some professional interview by that unauthorized entrance.

The room was empty. The papers on the doctor's desk were blown about as the autumn wind rushed in from the hall. There stood his vacant chair, dusty as with the dust of many days; that solemn-looking, morocco-covered, high-backed arm-chair, in which the physician had been wont to sit as in the place of judgment, and issue sentence of life or death. A pile of unopened letters lay on the desk: a spider had spun a gossamer bridge from stopper to stopper of the tarnished silver inkstand.

"O ma'am," gasped the butler, "I'm thankful to Providence that you've come home! If I'd known where to write I should have written to you, or your mamma-in-law, within the last three or four days, though my master ordered me not."

"Write to me—about what?" cried Flora, sorely agitated.

Something evil had arisen—what she knew not. The aspect of the house presaged calamity.

"Is Dr. Ollivant away?" she asked breathlessly.

The room looked as if it had been deserted for weeks.

"Away? O no, ma'am: he's too ill for that."

"Ill—is he ill?"

"Didn't he tell you, ma'am, in his letters? He told me he had said all that was necessary about himself, and that I was not to trouble about writing to you even if he got ever so bad; but just to bring in a hospital nurse, and leave him in Mr. Darley's hands—Mr. Darley of Bedford-square, you know, ma'am—and let him pull through."

"What is the matter? Pray, pray tell me everything! Is he very ill?" asked Flora piteously.

O tenderness, forgiveness, remorse, that came too late!

"God have pity on me," she prayed inwardly, "and save me from the anguish of unavailing regret!"

"Well, ma'am, I hope not very ill; but Mr. Darley owned last night that he didn't like the turn master had taken, and he sent me for Dr. Bayne, round in the square, and the two gentlemen was together talking for nearly half an hour, and they changed the medicine—which is a thing I never like, for my own part, doctors chopping and changing with medicine, as if they didn't know their own minds—and Mr. Darley told me to get in an extra nurse for night; and there I was in a cab half over London till after midnight; but I got a young person at last at the institution at Highbury, and a very nice young person she is."

"Has he been ill long?" Flora asked, taking off her hat and jacket hastily with trembling hands.

"Over three weeks, ma'am, off and on. It began with a chill, shivery-like, and then a kind of low fever hanging about him—no appetite, no rest. I could tell when I cleaned the lamp of a morning how many hours he'd sat in this room over-night. But he saw his patients, and went his daily round just as usual for a week; then all at once he knocked under, and took to his bed. It's no use," he said; "tell people who call that I'm out of town. I'll ask Mr. Darley to see my regular patients. And I went to fetch Mr. Darley, and he has attended master ever since."

"I'll go to him at once," said Flora, moving towards the stairs.

The man followed her nervously.

"I'm afraid you'll find him very bad, ma'am," he said.

"You must be prepared to see a great change in him."

"I am prepared for anything," she answered with a sob, "except to lose him."

And then she ran up-stairs, swift and light of footstep, making no sound upon the thickly-carpeted stone.

She opened the door of the front room on the second-floor—

the room that had been newly furnished for the doctor's bride—expecting to find the invalid there. But to her surprise she saw the furniture swathed in brown holland, the room empty. All things had been kept with religious care; the dressing-room, with its turquoise-and-gold upholstery, was shrouded from dust and light; carpet, curtains, mirrors, all covered. The rooms she had sanctified by her presence were to be profaned by no footfall in her absence. So near fanaticism is true love!

The back room on this floor was Mrs. Ollivant's, and the door was locked. Flora mounted the next flight swiftly, breathlessly, and opened the door of that room where she had awakened one winter afternoon from the long night of delirium. Yes, he was there; on the bed where she had lain through so many fever-haunted nights reposed the wasted form of her deserted husband. She could see the sharp angles of his figure beneath the tumbled bedclothes. The nurse was sitting at a table by the window taking notes of her case. A clock ticked upon the mantel-piece, a pinched little fire burned in the grate, the room was littered with medicine bottles, all the apparatus of sickness ready—weapons whereby Life does battle with his grim adversary, Death.

He was awake; the large hollow eyes were turned towards the door by which Flora entered, but with how vacant a gaze! He looked at her, and did not know her.

She went over to the bed, knelt down beside it, took his burning hand in hers, whispered to him softly, kissed his parched lips. Without avail. There was no one in this wide world more strange to him than she.

"Another nurse!" he said wearily. "What is the use of all this fuss?"

"Not a hired nurse, Cuthbert; your wife—your sorrowful, loving wife—come back to nurse you. Look at me, dear. Your own true wife has returned, never to leave you again."

He turned his haggard eyes to her face, and stared at her fixedly, without one ray of recognition.

"What is the good of all these people?" he exclaimed. "I had better be in a hospital at once, if my room is to be full of hospital nurses. Go away, please," to Flora; "and leave me in peace, if you can. You are always tormenting me about something."

The nurse, who had started up, surprised at Flora's entrance, now came forward, and took possession of the intruder, with a professional air of authority.

"Oh, if you please, ma'am, you mustn't talk to him. The doctors say he must be kept very quiet."

"But I am his wife——"

"Yes, ma'am, and your coming in so suddenly might have given him a shock if he had known you. Perhaps it was lucky he didn't recognise you."

"Lucky!" repeated Flora with a blank look. "Will he ever know me again, I wonder?"

"O dear, yes; don't be afraid, ma'am," answered the nurse cheerfully; it was so easy for a hired nurse, who came and went like the wind, to be cheerful; "he'll come round again, and remember you, I daresay, before long. I have seen worse cases of typhoid than him."

"But he is dangerously ill, is he not?" asked Flora hopelessly.

"The doctors are anxious about him, ma'am; but with care—— It is not a hopeless case. You mustn't think that, ma'am. Pray don't!"

"What have you been writing there?"

"Only my journal of the case, ma'am. The doctors wish me to keep an account of everything the patient takes—a spoonful of jelly or an ounce of beef-tea. I give him everything in that two-ounce glass. It's most important that he should take nourishment and be kept quiet."

"Does his mind wander much?"

"No, ma'am, not very bad; but he sometimes says odd things. He has talked of you a great deal in the last few days, and has sometimes fancied you were in the room."

"And now I have come he does not know me. That seems hard."

"He may know you by-and-by, ma'am," said the nurse consolingly. "He changes very quickly."

"If you could let me do something for him; if I could be of use, in any way," pleaded Flora.

"Indeed, ma'am, there is very little to be done. You might help me, perhaps, when I have to give him medicine, or wine, or beef-tea. He dislikes taking anything, and it is sometimes quite difficult to get him to take it."

"I will gladly help you in any way," said Flora eagerly. "I shall feel less miserable if I can be of ever so little use. May I stay in the room, please?—I will be very quiet."

All this was spoken in so subdued a tone that the sound of the two voices could hardly reach the bed where the patient lay, moving head or arms restlessly, every now and then, in utter weariness.

"The doctor said he was to be kept so very quiet, ma'am; there was to be nobody but the nurse in his room; but if you will not talk or move about much, I should think you might stay."

It seemed a hard thing to deny a wife the right to sit in her dying husband's chamber, for the nurse had but the faintest hope of a happy issue out of Dr. Ollivant's peril. It was not the virulence of the disease that was to be feared so much as the weakness of the patient. He had not cared to live, and he had let life slip away from him. He had wasted the wealth of a vigorous constitution upon long nights of sleeplessness; weariest vigils, full of sad thoughts and bitter vain regrets. He had wilfully squandered the forces of his manhood, reckless of his loss. Life without Flora meant misery. He had been too much of a man to end the difficulty with a dose of prussic acid or a pistol bullet; but he had not been enough of a Christian to trust in God for the coming of the brighter day; and he had been glad when he felt his strength ebbing away from him, and saw his years dwindling to the briefest span. Of what avail was that empty arid future which lies between ruined hopes and the grave? His wife had renounced him. His child had been taken from him. No other child would ever be born to him, to be the staff and comfort of his age. He had earned more than enough to secure the independence of his mother's declining years. There was no reason why he should desire life, either on his own account or for the sake of others. So when he found his strength leaving him, and the insidious low fever—a poison, inhaled perchance in hospital ward or fetid alley, acting upon a debilitated constitution—that fever whose danger he knew so well, fastening its deadly grip upon him, he had no sentiment but gladness.

"She will feel just a shade of sorrow, perhaps," he said to himself, "when somebody tells her that I am dead; just one brief pang of regret for him who loved as Othello loved—not wisely. And then some new bright life will open before her; and a few years hence, when she has formed new ties, and is the centre of some happy home, she will look back at her past, and all the days that she spent with me will seem only a brief unfinished chapter in the full volume of her life. To me it has been the whole book; to her it may appear only an episode."

Thus Cutbert Ollivant had laid himself down very calmly when the hour came in which he could no longer perform his daily task-work. It was not until he felt a cloud stealing over mind and senses, and his wits wandering as he tried to concentrate his attention upon a patient's answers to his almost mechanical questioning, that the doctor felt it was time for him to succumb. Physical weakness or weariness would have hardly driven him away from his consulting-room—he clung to his work as the one thing left to him in life—but when he felt his mind troubled, and found his hand falter uncertainly in the

writing of a simple prescription, he was fain to confess that his working days were over.

"Opus operatum est," he said to himself. "My career is finished, and it stops short of fame."

He went up-stairs to his room on the third floor, one bright September afternoon, and laid himself down upon his bed, with a quiet conviction that this was for him the end of all earthly business. He would fain have let life gently glide away without wearisome endeavour to revive the expiring flame, and it was only to satisfy his faithful old servant that he allowed Mr. Darley to be called in.

This gentleman, a family practitioner of standing, had done his best, but the malady had not yielded to his skill. The patient's weakness had increased day after day, and Mr. Darley had confessed unwillingly that the time of peril had come. Unless a change for the better occurred before many hours were over, the end was inevitable.

It was at this crisis that Flora arrived in Wimpole-street.

All that day she sat by her husband's bed, in the shadow of the curtains, and heard his restless movements, his broken murmured words—disjointed sentences, in which her own name sometimes occurred, but which were at other times purely scientific, with here and there a few words of Latin. She made no farther effort to win his recognition. The nurse had told her silence and quiet were of vital consequence, and she obeyed to the letter. With her heart yearning towards that unconscious sufferer, she sat quietly in her shadowy corner, breathing voiceless prayers for his recovery. It was only after seven o'clock that she thought of poor Mrs. Ollivant, at this moment placidly expecting her son and daughter at the Willows. "Poor mamma," she said to herself, "I ought to telegraph to her. How cruel of me not to have sent for her sooner; how cruel to keep her away from her son's sick-bed!" She stole noiselessly from the room, ran down-stairs to the old servant, and despatched him to the telegraph-office with a message:

"Dear mamma, Cuthbert is very ill. Come at once."

At eight o'clock came Mr. Darley, and Dr. Bayne from Cavendish-square. How Flora's heart sank as the two grave elderly men came into the room, and bent over the sick-bed, and ordered a candle to be brought, and examined their patient, with a professional uncereemoniousness that seemed like sacrilege! They listened to his breathing, and tapped his chest and back, and experimented with him in various ways, and anon looked at each other gravely, and whispered a little together with dismal meaning, as it seemed to Flora. She sat motionless, saying not a word, and neither of the doctors had any idea of her presence,

till the nurse informed them in a whisper that young Mrs. Ollivant had come home, and wished to be allowed to help in nursing her husband.

Then the two gentlemen turned to her with a friendly sympathetic air, and murmured a few kindly words, but words that had no hopefulness in them.

Flora heard them in silence, and then followed them out of the room.

"Gentlemen," she cried piteously, when they were on the landing outside, "tell me the truth! Will my husband die?"

"My dear Mrs. Ollivant," said Dr. Bayne, who had been a frequent visitor in Wimpole-street during her happy wedded life, "while the faintest spark of life still remains there is always a ray of hope; but I fear—I sadly fear my poor friend is dying."

She looked at him tearlessly for a few moments, and then said gently,

"I thank you for telling me the truth. It is best."

She went back to her husband's room—in the abandonment of her grief forgot all that she had been told about the need of quietness—and flung herself on her knees by his side.

"My love, my love," she sobbed, "my lost love! Is there no forgiveness in heaven for my sin against you?"

Her voice, those keen accents of anguish, pierced the dimness of delirium. Cuthbert Ollivant opened his eyes and looked at her, this time with recognition in his gaze.

"Flora!" he murmured faintly.

There was neither surprise nor joy in his tone. In his utter weakness of mind and body he had passed beyond the region of strong emotions.

"My love, it is I—your wife—your sorrowful, repentant wife!"

"No," he said, with ever so faint a touch of wonder; "that cannot be; my wife hates me."

She remembered her words in the garden that fatal summer evening—words of unmitigated hatred and contempt; words keener than a sword thrust, and harder to forget.

"My dearest, I was unjust, cruel, ungrateful," sobbed Flora. "It has pleased God to open my eyes to my wickedness. I have something to tell you about Walter by-and-by; something that will set your mind at rest. O live, dearest; live, for my sake; and all my life to come shall be one long atonement."

He contemplated her mutely for a few moments, with a strangely pathetic look, and then answered quietly:

"Too late, my dear. The pitcher is broken at the fountain."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"There is a deep nick in Time's restless wheel
For each man's good ; when which nick comes, it strikes :
As rhetoric yet works not persuasion,
But only is a mean to make it work ;
So no man riseth by his real merit,
But when in cries clink in his Raiser's spirit."

"Fate hath no voice but the heart's impulses."

HAVING once, in a fortunate hour, made a halt upon the road to ruin, Jarred Gurner seemed fairly disposed to stop short altogether upon that broad highway, and to turn his steps towards that narrower and more thorny path which honest industry travels, not altogether without cheering sunshine or mild refreshing shower.

The sight of his daughter, refined and beautified by her three years of prosperous married life, the thought of his bonny lass Loo made a lady, and yet not too proud to own and love him, had not been without a wholesome effect.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed, after that unexpected visit of Mrs. Leyburne's in Voysey-street, "come what may, I won't disgrace Loo; no abusive snob shall ever put her out of countenance by calling her father a welsher. I'll try and make both ends meet with the three hundred a year Leyburne allows me, and I'll live like an artist and a gentleman. And the first step in that direction," added Jarred, with a touch of rancour, "shall be to shut up that blessed rag-shop down-stairs."

The second-hand wardrobe had been ever a bone of contention between Mrs. Gurner and her son. It was a trade against which Jarred's soul revolted. He hated the look of the tawdry finery hanging in the window; he was suspicious of the women who came, generally sheltered by the shades of evening, to buy or sell. The traffic might add a few shillings to the weekly stock, but its tawdry disreputability was poorly atoned for by the shillings that dribbled through Mrs. Gurner's hands, and served to pay the milkman, or propitiate the chandler with a trifle on account.

Jarred went down-stairs at once, and into the shop, where he made a contemptuous survey of his mother's stock-in-trade, set

forth and displayed in a manner which Mrs. Gurner considered "taking:" a limp blue-gauze ball-dress, crowned with a crumpled wreath of artificial camellias; a pair of soiled white-satin shoes, daintily placed side by side with a dilapidated fan; a rusty black moire-antique gracefully draped with a ragged yak-lace shawl; a ruby-velvet bonnet, perched on the top of an imitation-sable muff, suggestive of comfortable attire for the coming winter.

"I suppose, taking them in the heap, they might realise a five-pound note," mused Jarred.

Mrs. Gurner emerged from her retirement on the other side of a screen of drapery, and confronted her son with an injured air. She had been reading the seventeenth number of *Mabel Mandeville, or the Duchess's Death-Warrant*, in a comfortable corner, sheltered from autumn's sharpening breezes by a tumbled velvet paletot and a silk dress or two hanging on a clothes-horse.

"You've no call to depreciate the stock, Jarred," she said. "You had the full benefit of that one pound seventeen-and-sixpence I got for the voylet satin, and if it hadn't been for that money we should have been left without a drop of water for the tea-kettle. The collector called that very afternoon, quite out of patience."

"That's all very well, mother, but how many one pound seventeen-and-sixpences have we ever got out of this blessed hole? Half-a-crown or three-and-sixpence has been about your biggest line, in a general way."

"It has been a help, Jarred."

"Perhaps it has, but I mean to try if we can't do without such helps in future. I've always detested the business, you know, and the class of people it brings about us, whether they're lady's-maids out of place, or something worse; and now that Loo has come home, as good a lady as any in the land, I've made up my mind to shut up shop. So you may just put your rags together, and call in some one to value them, and then sell 'em offhand."

"There's the good-will of the business, Jarred, if you think of moving," suggested Mrs. Gurner dolefully.

"The good-will of a business that brings in something under fifteen shillings a week at its best!" ejaculated Jarred contemptuously. "Besides, I don't think of moving; I mean to furnish this room decently as a parlour, instead of pigging in that hole at the back; and in short, mother, though I daresay you won't believe me, I mean to turn over a new leaf, and live like an artist and an honest man."

"I'm sure I'm very glad to hear you *say* as much, Jarred,"

replied Mrs. Gurner, with an emphasis on the word "say." "Three hundred a year ought to be enough for us to live upon comfortably, and keep up a genteel appearance."

"I don't know about the genteel appearance," said Mr. Gurner doubtfully. "If it means living in a terrace of tabbies and government clerks, and going to church on Sunday mornings, it's out of my line. Voysey-street does well enough for me."

Mrs. Gurner heaved a plaintive sigh.

"It isn't Voysey-street I'm afraid of, Jarred," she said, "but the public-houses in the neighbourhood. You'll never be free from temptation while you live within five minutes' walk of the King's Head."

Jarred laughed this remonstrance to scorn.

"Do you suppose that a tavern-parlour is an institution peculiar to the neighbourhood of Voysey-street, mother?" he asked. "There are public-houses in your virtuous suburbs—yes, and sporting public-houses, too—in spite of the tabbies. But I do honestly mean to cut the turf. It has never brought me luck. I haven't the right sort of brains for book-making. It wants your stolid plodding dullard to make a Napoleon of the turf. I never was good at figures. Art and arithmetic won't run in double harness."

Comforted by this view of things, Mr. Gurner felt equal to turning his back upon the sporting public and the ring. It was a consoling sensation to feel himself too good for that kind of life, and to ascribe his failure to a superior genius. Nor had his friends of the turf behaved particularly well to him of late. Even Mr. Jobury, that mildest of butchers, had forgotten himself so far as to use insulting reference with regard to the nonpayment of that crown-piece borrowed on Hampton racecourse; a paltry sum, which no gentleman would have degraded himself by remembering. His coffers being replenished by a handsome gift from Louisa, Jarred devised the most cutting manner of repaying the trifling loan, loftily ignoring divers previous amounts, which would have swollen the crown to a five-pound note. He called at Mr. Jobury's one day at the family dinner-hour, and delivered the five shillings with sundry halfpence, neatly wrapped in paper, and delicately sealed, to the small domestic who opened the door, requesting the maiden, in a voice intended to be audible in Mr. Jobury's parlour, to inform her master that he refunded herewith the loan Mr. Jobury had been so uneasy about, principal and interest to date, and that he would be obliged for a receipt in full at Mr. Jobury's convenience.

This message, delivered in Jarred's haughtiest tone, meant eternal divorcement between Jobury and Gurner. Three days

afterwards Mr. Gurner received an unmistakably feminine epistle, in a scratchy caligraphy, beginning with Mr. Jobury's compliments, and finishing in the first person with small *i's*, requesting the repayment of those other moneys which Mr. Gurner stood indebted to his quondam friend. But of this somewhat vituperative composition Jarred discreetly avoided all acknowledgment.

Having thus dissevered himself from his bosom friend, Jarred felt that he was on his way to the Temple of Virtue. The sight of his daughter had moved him deeply. Her grace, her refinement, awakened in him a new disgust for his own sordid life; her affection, unchanged and unchanging, touched some gentler chord in his nature. He remembered remorsefully how little he had ever done to culture so bright a flower; how this poor child had grown up like Cinderella, amidst dirt and ashes, without even a fairy godmother; and how small a right he had to the love she yielded him so freely.

"I suppose you had to come to me on the sly, my girl," he said to his daughter that night in Voysey-street.

"No, father, I never have any secrets from Walter," she answered gently. "We only reached London at four o'clock this afternoon. We are staying at the Charing Cross for a few days before we start for our autumn tour, and directly after dinner I sent for a cab and came here to you. Grandmother was so pleased to see me. It seemed like old times; except that there was no nagging," added Loo, with a smile.

"But your husband didn't like your coming here, I'll warrant," said Jarred moodily.

"Well, no father, honestly he would keep us apart if he could. He hasn't quite forgiven you for keeping him in hiding all the time he was ill. He thinks that through your conduct on that occasion he has been made to play a paltry part towards that poor young lady, Miss Chamney."

"Why what a blessed fool you are, Loo!" exclaimed her father, with mingled aggravation and contempt. "Don't you know that he would have married that poor young lady but for my *coup d'état*? If I had not contrived to make Dr. Ollivant believe he was dead and done for, young Leyburne would have been taken home to Mr. Chamney's house, and nursed and petted and cried over by the young lady; and then when he got well of course he'd have married her, as in duty bound, and been miserable ever afterwards, since any one with an eye in their head could have told that you were the only woman he ever cared for. There never was such a pigheaded, ungrateful girl as you, Loo, for looking at things in the wrong light. If it hadn't been for my seizing upon the chance that Providence

flung in my way, you'd never have been Walter Leyburne's wife!"

"I know that, father, and the knowledge of it has given me many a miserable hour. I owe all my happiness to a trick. I feel as if we had set a snare for Walter, and that I was the meanest of women in marrying him."

"You couldn't have married him if he hadn't asked you, and he wouldn't have married you if he hadn't loved you better than any one else," retorted Jarred, with ever-increasing contempt. "But I think you might be grateful to the man who saved your lover from his entanglement with another woman, and brought you and him together, by one happy stroke of business. If I'd been a sleepy kind of a customer, and let the golden opportunity slip by me, you wouldn't be Mrs. Walter Leyburne."

Touched by this reproof, Loo put her arms round her father's neck, and kissed him as tenderly as at their first greeting.

"Dear father, I am not ungrateful," she said; "I know that all you did was done for my sake. Only——"

"Only, you are ashamed to remember that you owe all your good fortune to your poor old father's help. Never mind, Loo, it is but the way of the world. When a man has mounted a ladder, the first thing he does is to kick it down. I'm not offended, and I'm not surprised."

Jarred stood upon his dignity for a few minutes after this, and Loo had some slight difficulty in bringing him round again to his pleasanter humour. But he could not long resist the blandishments of the daughter who had been made a lady. She had an air and a grace that were so new to him. Her voice, always rich and full, had now a subdued sweetness that moved him like music. The wandering life she had led with her artist husband, the communion with all that is loveliest and grandest in nature, the study of all that is purest and noblest in art, had been a higher educational process than any formal scholastic routine ever devised by mortal teacher, and Loo had profited by her opportunities of culture. Jarred's rugged nature succumbed to a new influence. At parting that night, Loo slipped her purse into her father's hand.

"It's only a little of my pocket-money, father," she said, "but I daresay it may be useful."

"My dear, it will," replied Jarred frankly.

"And by-and-by, if I can persuade Walter to stop in England, and settle down to his work, and make a name for himself, as I am sure he could, I shall be able to come to see you very often, father," Loo said tenderly. "You would like me to come, wouldn't you?"

"Like you to come! Why, what else in the world have I to

be fond of or proud of, Loo? And you know I always was proud of you, my lass; not that I ever thought you'd grow up such a beauty."

"And perhaps Walter might be of some use to you professionally," continued Loo, blushing at the paternal praise. "He could recommend you to people who want pictures restored, or violins doc—renovated," said Loo, tripping a little over the dubious word.

"Perhaps he might, my dear, if he cared to take so much trouble," replied Jarred, rather stiffly.

And thus father and daughter had parted, a day or two before Mr. and Mrs. Leyburne left London for that pleasant leisurely tour which brought them ultimately to the Irish lakes.

It was the remembrance of this interview with his daughter which inspired Jarred with the yearning for a life somewhat more decent in tone than the loose fragmentary existence he had been leading for the last year or two. He did not sigh for actual respectability,—days and nights regulated by the clock; meals at stated hours; a ten-roomed house in the suburbs; a bed of geraniums in a garden fourteen feet by twelve; and a parlour-maid with a white apron. These things had no attraction for him. But it had somehow entered into his mind that there was a better life within his capacity than that downhill career which he had been travelling with such companions as Joseph Jobury and that gentleman's particular circle. Nay, evoked from some hidden depths in his nature, there had shone forth of late stray gleams of manhood and independence. That five-pound note earned from Mr. Ahasuerus, the violin dealer, by his own patient labour had been sweeter to him than Dr. Ollivant's hush-money, or even largesse from Walter Leyburne, on whose purse a father-in-law had some claim.

Jarred called in the nearest auctioneer without delay, and asked his advice as to the disposal of the second-hand wardrobe. Mr. Plyson, the auctioneer, who was experienced in the sale and barter of petty stocks-in-trade, looked about him dubiously for a minute or so before replying.

"How long have you had the business?" he asked Mr. Gurner.

"It's my mother's business, not mine," answered Jarred contemptuously. "She's been trading in these blessed rags for the last nineteen or twenty years, I believe."

"Then why not sell the stock and good-will together?" asked the auctioneer.

"That's what I say," ejaculated Mrs. Gurner dolefully.

"Put an advertisement in *Lloyd's Weekly*—A genteel old-established business, admirably adapted to a widow or two sisters. Only a small capital required. Nothing degrading to the feelings."

"That's how I've always looked at it," moaned Mrs. Gurner.

"The stock by itself would hardly realise ten pounds, I should think," said the professional valuer; "but the stock and good-will ought to bring fifty."

"If you put it in that light, I'm agreeable," answered Jarred. "I don't know that I wouldn't as leave live anywhere else, provided I can get a north light."

The matter was decided on the spot. The auctioneer was to find a purchaser for the business, and a tenant for the house, in one and the same person, and Mrs. Gurner and her son were to transport their household goods to some new abode. So cleverly did this accomplished agent manage matters, that in less than three weeks he reappeared in Voysey-street with two maiden sisters, whose minds were set upon a genteel business, and who entertained Mrs. Gurner's ideas about the vulgarity of scales and weights. To these two spinsters, sallow of complexion and sour of aspect, Mr. Plyson exhibited Mrs. Gurner's account-books, and demonstrated by a species of arithmetical conjuration that the business had been an eminently remunerative one during that lady's lengthened career. He dwelt much upon the ladies' wardrobe having been established twenty years, whereby he argued its unchequered prosperity; and was altogether so convincing, that the elderly spinsters, after coming backwards and forwards several times, and "mauling about" the stock-in-trade, as Jarred called it, ultimately agreed to give five-and-forty pounds for the stock and good-will, and to become proprietors, as annual tenants, of the house and lodgers, "all unfurnished and permanencies," Mrs. Gurner remarked proudly.

Mrs. Gurner was ravished at the prospect of removal to a new abode. Her dreams were haunted by visions of eight-roomed tenements at Brompton or South Kensington—districts which nowadays represent a distinction without a difference. She thought seriously of the Kennington-road, and had her fancies about Camberwell; and in her daily tasks and nightly slumbers she was pursued by the image of a nice little bit of garden, which, with the natural yearning of a soul long prisoned in a labyrinthine wilderness of brick and mortar, she had set her mind upon possessing.

"It would be such an interest for you, Jarred," she pleaded, "and so good for your health, to do a little gardening of a morning before breakfast, if it was only to train a scarlet-runner.

You'd enjoy your roll and your rasher, or your Yarmouth bloater ever so much better for a breath of fresh air."

"Well, I shouldn't mind a bit of a grass-plat, and a tree to smoke my pipe under," said Jarred yieldingly.

"Or an arbour, Jarred, with a nice little table in it, and all comfortable. Hops grow so quickly, and climb so gracefully."

"Yes, and so do slugs and spiders," grunted Jarred with a cynical air.

"Do you remember that arbour at Cricklewood, where we had tea one Sunday afternoon, ever so many years ago, when you took me for an outing, Jarred? We did so enjoy ourselves, and it was quite romantic and rural-like to hear the cows lowing in the meadows, and see the hansoms driving past to the Welsh Harp."

"I'll tell you what," said Jarred, after a few thoughtful whiffs of his pipe, "I wouldn't mind a nice little detached cottage, where we could be snug and comfortable and all to ourselves, and where Loo could come to see us when she had the mind, without having a pack of street-boys and magging old women staring at her. But I won't have anything to say to Brompton or South Kensington; that sounds too much like tabbies and psalm-singing."

"Besides which, I'm afraid the rents would be beyond us in that neighbourhood," replied Mrs. Gurner, ready to concede any point now that Jarred seemed inclined to satisfy the desire of her soul for a suburban residence and a garden.

"Of course," said Jarred; "wherever there's psalm-singing the rents go up. You stick a gothic church with a tall steeple in the middle of an empty field, and three years afterwards you've got a genteel suburb. The semi-detached villas sprout up like mushrooms after rain. I'll tell you what, old lady, if you've set your heart on a bit of garden, I'll walk over Camberwell way this afternoon, and look about me."

"Lor, Jarred," cried Mrs. Gurner, enraptured, "when you speak like that you remind me of your father in his best days!"

"Thank you, mother. I daresay you mean it as a compliment, but I don't care to be reminded of any resemblance between myself and that party."

"He was as fine a man as ever wore shoe-leather when he and I were married," answered Mrs. Gurner plaintively. "You remember him when he was but a wreck, Jarred; when things had gone wrong with him, and he'd been led astray. But you oughtn't to be hard upon him, Jarred. It isn't given to every one to keep the right path; and there's many times I've sat in this chair and sobbed my heart out for fear your poor father's

weakness was hereditary, and you was going the same way."

"No," said Jarred with dignity; "I'm not a saint, but I have contrived to stop short of felony."

"Ah, Jarred, if you knew how narrow is the line of dimergence! Your poor father would never have gone astray if it hadn't been for the betting-ring. He always used to say it was a mill-stream, and it would suck him down some day; and so it did."

"I think you may as well let bygones be bygones, mother. There's no particular good in raking up stale mud."

"When the heart is overloaded, Jarred, there must be some relief."

"You'd better employ yourself in furbishing up the stock against those two unhappy females enter into possession. I'll take an Atlas as far as Walworth-gate," said Jarred, putting on his hat.

"Coldharbour-lane is a lovely neighbourhood," suggested Mrs. Gurner. "I remember the famous Greenacre murder when I was a girl, and a portion of the body being found in Coalharbour-lane. There's the Grove, too, where George Barnwell——"

But Jarred had vanished, and Mrs. Gurner, with her chronic sigh, took up a clothes-brush and began the work of renovation upon a well-worn velvet mantle.

Perhaps Jarred, in yielding to his mother's desire for fresh woods and pastures new—in the shape of "a bit of garden"—was not altogether sacrificing inclination to duty. In sooth, since the idea of mending his ways and breaking with the Jobury set had stolen upon him, Voysey-street had lost much of its old familiar charm. Voysey-street without the Jobury set was dismal as a deserted club-house, and Jarred felt that his only chance of holding himself aloof from the too fascinating parlour of the King's Head was to put a three-mile walk, or a threepenny omnibus ride between his own abode and temptation. Even then there was the possibility that the tempter might be too strong for him. He might find himself drawn back to the enchanted spot. Yet by quarrelling with Jobury he had, as he told himself, taken a step in the right direction. He and Mr. Jobury now cut each other with cruellest deliberation at every chance encounter: but were Jobury, overcome by a gush of feeling, to extend his hand, and cry, "Gurner what an ass you've made of yourself!" Jarred felt that all the strength of his manhood would not be strong enough to resist that friendly appeal. He would melt at once, and he and Joseph Jobury would again be as brothers. So Jarred made his way into

Regent-street, by various short cuts through noisome alleys—having your thoroughbred Londoner's antipathy to broad and airy streets and cleanly rectangular ways—and anon clambered up to the box-seat of an Atlas, which carried him as far as Walworth-turnpike.

Mr. Gurner had passed the few years of his wedded life in this neighbourhood, and a thread of tender memories was interwoven with those narrow side-streets which intersect the district between the two broad highways of Walworth and Kennington. He had been fond of his young wife, after his own careless fashion, and they had lived comfortably together for four years of a nomadic kind of existence; roaming from lodging to lodging, with a small cart-load of battered old goods and chattels, which just served to furnish a couple of rooms in a scanty gipsy fashion. They had moved for the mere pleasure of locomotion, it would seem, but urged thereto by some fond hallucination that the new second-floor to which they were going was infinitely superior in accommodation and situation to the domicile they were leaving; and in this manner had peregrinated all over Walworth—now to be found on a first-floor in Beresford-street; anon ascending a story higher in Manor-place, or making a flank movement to Hampton-street. Mrs. Jarred Gurner had died of a cold caught in her last change of abode, on which occasion the nomads had pitched their tent too soon after the scrubbing of the floors. Old Mrs. Gurner was wont to describe pathetically how that damp second-floor back had settled upon Louisa's lungs; but the gods may have beheld that young matron with peculiar favour, inasmuch as the fatal shaft struck her before age had withered or custom staled her in the estimation of Mr. Gurner. She died at four-and-twenty years of age, and Jarred honestly lamented her. It was after her death that he cast in his lot with his mother, and became joint proprietor with her of the house in Voysey-street, whither Louisa—then between two and three years old—was conveyed. And thus it happened that Loo had grown up in Voysey-street, and had no memory of any other shelter than that dingy old tenement in a decayed locality.

To-day, surveying the bustling Walworth-road from the box-seat of the Atlas, Jarred felt a pang of regret for his bright young wife, dead twenty years ago. He remembered their shifty wandering life, their cosy little hot suppers, and savoury meat-teas; the banquets they had made upon bloaters and bread-and-butter; their aldermanic feasts upon sausages or a grilled haddock; their evening rambles in "the Road," when the shop-windows were lighted and the pavements crowded,

and the scene had, for them, all the life and brightness of a Parisian boulevard.

"Poor old days, they're past and gone!" Jarred said to himself with a sigh. "I should have been a better man, I think, if Louisa had lived."

An idle fancy this, perhaps; yet the thought had a softening influence, and Mr. Gurner esteemed himself more kindly on account of that capacity for better things which had been nipped in the bud by his wife's untimely death. With this softer feeling full upon him, and at every footstep recalling fond memories of his youth, Jarred peregrinated Camberwell, and about sunset discovered a queer little lop-sided house, with a weedy neglected garden backing on to a canal. The garden was small certainly; but it was larger than the oblong patch of barren ground which is usually allotted to a modern villa within three miles of Charing Cross, and it was screened from the outer world by a dense hedge of elder hawthorn. In the middle of the rank grass-plot there stood a fine old pear-tree—a tree that must have been planted a century ago, when Camberwell was among the most rustic of suburban villages—a tree with a thick rugged trunk and spreading branches, which in this autumnal season bore actual pears. They might have the flavour of turnips and the consistence of wood, but they were pears.

That pear-tree decided Jarred. There was a decent-sized room on the first-floor, with a window facing north—an apartment which would serve for Mr. Gurner's work-room; and he did not concern himself in any wise about the rest of the rooms, which were somewhat small and eccentric in shape. He made no inquiries as to coal-cellar or wash-house, he drew no evil augury from the smoke-blackened chimneypiece in the kitchen: but he struck a bargain on the spot with the agent who showed him the tenement. He was to have the house—Malvina Cottage was its name—rent-free for the ensuing quarter, on consideration of his foregoing all repair and embellishment thereof, and at an annual rent of five-and-twenty pounds afterwards.

"And it's one of the cheapest houses in Camberwell," said the agent with conviction, "and one of the most convenient for a small family."

"It seems to have been a longish time to let," remarked Jarred, contemplating the weedy garden.

"I might have let it no end of times, if I hadn't stuck out for a substantial tenant," replied the agent. "By the bye, I suppose you can give satisfactory references."

"I have lived twenty years in the house I now occupy," said Jarred loftily; "and I can refer you to my landlord."

"That's more than sufficient."

Jarred returned to Voysey-street after dark, well satisfied with his work. That pear-tree had fascinated him. He had pleasant ideas of long lazy Sabbath mornings, seated in a beehive chair under that tree, smoking the pipe of contentment, and listening to the church-bells as they called less independent-minded citizens to the morning service. He liked the notion of Malvina Cottage, that domicile being in a peculiarly retired corner—a narrow little bit of lane between a church and the canal, which led nowhere. He felt that he could live his own life there, and that his artistic powers in the manipulation of the fiddle family would burgeon afresh in that peaceful retirement.

He gave Mrs. Gurner a glowing description of the cottage, firing that long-suffering matron's soul with the idea that she was going to begin life afresh as a lady.

"You can keep a decent servant, old woman," he said; "not one of your chance girls, that come from nowhere, and are always gone home to their mothers when one wants them to run on an errand. On the income Leyburne allows us, and what I can add to it, we ought to live comfortably."

"And so we can, Jarred, if you will keep away from the public-house."

"I mean to do it, mother. I shall take my glass of hollands-and-water at home like a gentleman. I'm sick of your public-house riffraff."

This was Jarred Gurner's renunciation of his vices, and he was very much in earnest. He had tasted too much of the dust and ashes that constitute the core of life's Dead-Sea fruit, and was inclined to forego pleasures that had brought discomfort and disgust in their train. And deep in his heart there lurked the desire to be more worthy of his handsome daughter, a less incongruous element in Mrs. Walter Leyburne's life.

"I know she's fond of me," he said to himself, "and she has been true as steel from first to last. But if she were to meet me walking in the street with any of my old chums she'd be obliged to cut me. I should like to stand a little bit higher in the social scale, so that Loo could point to me, and say, 'That's my father,' without a blush."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“ Meantime Luke began
To slacken in his duty ; and, at length,
He in the dissolute city gave himself
To evil courses : ignominy and shame
Fell on him—

* * * * *
There is a comfort in the strength of love ;
’Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would overset the brain, or break the heart.”

It was Mrs. Gurner’s last day but one in Voysey-street. The furniture was ready for removal ; the small stock of glass and crockery packed in a crate, with the ironmongery at bottom by way of ballast ; Jarred’s pictures—the Guido for which he had so long sought a purchaser, and various other canvases of problematical value—swathed in an old dressing-gown, and bound together with a clothes-line ; a battered old portmanteau, standing on end in the passage ; the fire-irons tied up in brown paper ; the chest of drawers turned the wrong way ; a general air of upside-downishness pervading the apartments, so soon to be abandoned by their present tenants.

The day was waning, and Mrs. Gurner sat alone by her dismantled hearth. She had toiled patiently since morning at the packing, while Jarred was agreeably busy at Malvina Cottage, helping a jobbing carpenter to nail up shelves, and put up a bedstead or two, and directing the operations of a jobbing gardener, who was endeavouring to reduce the neglected garden to order and symmetry by means of a scythe and a pruning-knife.

Having done her duty bravely—struggling heroically with feather beds, and nearly dislocating her spine in the delicate task of packing the crate—Mrs. Gurner seated herself in one of the two remaining chairs, and indulged in the luxury of a “ good cry.” Why she should weep at the prospect of abandoning a place which she had long yearned to leave is a question for psychologists to answer. She wept with a vague self-pity ; remembering the dreary years she had lived in that house, and the small leaven of joy in her full measure of grief and care. She had struggled on, grubbed on, somehow, for twenty years, never utterly free from anxiety, rarely knowing an hour which had not been haunted by the vision of an angry tax-gatherer or an exasperated landlord. And yet, just at the last, she shed

regretful tears, remembering stray hours of comfort, thinking of this old parlour as the living thing of their beloved dead, forgetting its faults, remembering only its better qualities.

"I don't think there's a snigger room of a winter's evening, or a better grate to draw," she said to herself. "I only hope the chimneys don't smoke at Malvina Cottage, and that there's an oven that will bake a pie. Jarred might have paid me the compliment to ask me to go over to Camberwell and see the house before he settled everything, but he always had such impetuous ways."

Mrs. Gurner made herself a cup of tea dolefully, as if she had been infusing hemlock for a final sedative, and produced the remains of yesterday's dinner from the cupboard; but she was too depressed in spirit to care much for the good things of this life, and the blade-bone of a cold shoulder had no charm for her. She sat and sipped her tea and meditated; now shaking her head pensively with a languid sigh, now wiping a tear from her dim old eyes. By the time she had finished her third cup she had arrived at a desperate resolution.

"I'll go round to Wimpole-street, and have another look at her before I leave the neighbourhood," she said to herself. "I've never annoyed her, or gone near her, or put forward any claim, in all these years; but I feel as if I couldn't go across the water—for at my age I'm not likely to be coming backwards and forwards to this part of London—until I've had another look at her, and heard her pretty voice again. I don't seek for anything from her, wealthy as she is; I don't want to obtrude myself upon her; but I feel as if it would do me good to see her."

Mrs. Gurner rose, and hastened to remove the traces of her day's labour by means of mild ablutions, conducted rather upon the continental hotel principle, of a little water in a small basin going a long way. She brushed and curled her front, put on a clean collar, and a large and awe-inspiring brooch of the cameo tribe, representing a straight-nosed Minerva in a helmet—a goddess whom Mrs. Gurner insisted upon mistaking for Britannia. Since the sale of the plum-coloured satin, and the disposal of the stock-in-trade, Mrs. Gurner possessed no such thing as a best gown; but she shook and brushed her every-day raiment, and contrived to make herself tolerably tidy. As she contemplated her front and bonnet sideways in the small and somewhat cloudy looking-glass, she flattered herself that there could be no mistake as to her pretensions to gentility.

It was only six o'clock, and she knew that Jarred, pleased with Malvina Cottage as a child with a new toy, was not likely

to return till long after dark. She had laid in provision for his supper—a couple of pork-chops with the kidney in them—and felt easy in her mind; so she locked the parlour-door behind her, slipped the key under the mat—an agreed-upon hiding-place—and set out upon her errand.

She went by various small streets to Regent-street, and thence across Cavendish-square to Wigmore-street, and into Wimpole-street, the professional aspect of which thoroughfare impressed her strongly. She walked briskly along, looking at the numbers, till she came to Dr. Ollivant's door. Here she stopped, and knocked a timorous double-knock, and jingled the bell feebly.

"I feel *that* faint, that I'm sure I shall drop if the door isn't opened quick," she said to herself.

There was some delay before the door opened, but Mrs. Gurner contrived to maintain her equilibrium, and had just strength to inform the butler, in a faint voice, that she wished to see Mrs. Ollivant on particular business.

"I don't think my mistress will be able to see you," the man answered; "my master is very ill, and Mrs. Ollivant is in his room."

"O dear!" sighed Mrs. Gurner, "I'd set my heart upon seeing her this evening."

"If it's an application for relief, or anything in that way, it's not the least use," said the butler, almost shutting the door in the timorous visitor's face.

At this insult Mrs. Gurner plucked up her spirit.

"I'm not a pauper, though I do not come in my carriage-and-pair," she replied. "Perhaps if you'll be good enough to say that a connection of your mistress's wishes to have a few words with her, Mrs. Ollivant will be good enough to see me."

The man looked doubtful. After all, this shabby-genteel female might be a poor relation of his master's wife's. Needy connections are crab-apples that grow upon every family tree. Perhaps it might be an unwise thing to be churlish to this elderly applicant.

"If you'd like to step in and wait for a few minutes, I'll send up your name," said the butler.

Whereupon Mrs. Gurner entered the hall, and was ushered into the dining-room—a dismal apartment in the ghastly London twilight, and containing no portable property within reach of the intruder, should she be an impostor with larcenous intentions. The sideboard was locked; even the dryasdust books and pamphlets, usually exposed upon the table for the entertainment of patients, had been bundled into a heap and put away by the careful seneschal.

"Your name, if you please, ma'am."

"Gurner," replied the visitor hesitatingly, as if rather ashamed of that cognomen.

The butler retired, and sent a housemaid up to the sick-room, with the intimation that a person by the name of Gurner, and asserting herself to be a connection of Mrs. Ollivant junior, was waiting in the dining-room: he himself keeping watch and ward over the door of that apartment, lest Mrs. Gurner should levant with the fire-irons or the black marble timepiece, or should make a raid upon the property in the hall.

Flora came out of the sick-room at the housemaid's summons, fluttered and wondering. The girl had forgotten Mrs. Gurner's name, and had only contrived to say that a relation of her mistress's was waiting below; a startling announcement to Flora, who hardly knew of the existence of any one claiming kindred with her.

The doctor was asleep—that fitful slumber of exhaustion which seems to give so little rest. He was well guarded, for his mother had come from the Willows, and kept watch by his pillow night and day, whereby the professional nurses found their labours wondrously lightened.

"What shall I do, mamma?" said Flora helplessly, when the housemaid had stumbled through her message.

"You had better see this person, I suppose, my love. There can be no harm in seeing her."

So Flora went reluctantly to her unknown visitor, the butler opening the dining-room door with his grandest air as he ushered her in.

"Shall I bring the lamp, ma'am?"

"If you please," said Flora, almost afraid at finding herself in the semi-darkness with a stranger.

"I trust you will forgive my intruding upon you at such a time, Mrs. Ollivant," began the visitor.

Flora gave a start of surprise.

"I think I have heard your voice before," she exclaimed.

"Yes, my dear young lady, we have met once before."

"O, you wicked old woman!" cried Flora, kindling with sudden indignation. "I know you quite well. How dare you come here and pretend that you are a relation of mine? You above all other people! You who might have saved me years of agony if you had only spoken the truth when you came to see me at Kensington! You who knew that I was breaking my heart for an imaginary grief; that Dr. Ollivant, the best and noblest of men, was weighed down by the burden of an imaginary crime!"

"Circumstances alter cases, my dear young lady," pleaded Mrs. Gurner. "There were reasons why I could not speak so freely that day as I should like to have spoken. My granddaughter's happiness and prosperity in life depended upon my keeping the secret—a girl that was brought up by me from a sickly child of three years old, and was like a daughter to me. I said all that I dared venture upon saying. I hinted to you that it was foolish to grieve for a sweetheart that had been from the very first more taken by Louisa than by you. More than that was not in my power to say. When my son Jarred trusted me with the secret about Mr. Leyburne, he made me take my Bible oath not to breathe a word of it to a mortal. I shouldn't be here to-night if I hadn't heard from Louisa that you and Mr. Leyburne had met at Killarney, and that the secret was a secret no longer."

"And that was your granddaughter—Mr. Leyburne's wife—whom I saw with him, I suppose," said Flora with involuntary scorn.

"That was our Loo; as good a girl as ever lived, and the best of granddaughters. Never did a cross word pass between us in all the years she and me spent together," protested Mrs. Gurner, happily oblivious of all bygone misunderstandings.

"She is very handsome," said Flora, with that latent touch of scorn in her tone.

"She always had the makings of a handsome woman, but she's improved wonderfully since her marriage. Prosperity makes a great difference in people. I was counted a good-looking young woman in my day," sighed Mrs. Gurner, "but quite a different style from our Loo. She takes after the Gurners. The Shrubsons were fair and blue-eyed. My daughter that went to Australia was a thorough Shrubson; her eyes were as blue as yours; yes, my dear young lady, just such eyes as yours, with the self-same look in them."

Flora was not interested in these personal details. She was thinking with deepest anger and regret how much pain this wretched old woman could have spared her.

"Did you know that my husband considered himself guilty of Walter Leyburne's death," she asked; "and that your son traded upon his knowledge of my husband's secret, and extorted money from Dr. Ollivant?"

"No, Mrs. Ollivant; if my son Jarred demeaned himself to do that, he did it without my knowledge. I was never trusted by Jarred an inch further than it suited his convenience to trust me. Many a time have I suspected that he had means of getting money beyond my knowledge; but never did I think of anything so bad as that. All he told me about Mr. Leyburne

was that he was supposed to be dead, but was really alive, and that he was going to marry our Loo. He had been engaged to you, and it was only his supposed death that set him free. Of course my feelings and my interests were with Loo, the granddaughter I had brought up from an infant. She hadn't got through so much as the measles when she came to me, and I think if she whooped for one month the second year I had her, she whooped for ten. I never knew a child have the whooping-cough so long or so strong."

"Why did you come here to-night?" asked Flora. "Was it to gloat over my misery? My husband is dying."

"Gloat over your misery! O my blessed lamb, how can you say such cruel words?" exclaimed Mrs. Gurner. "You cut me to the quick. If you were to take a knife and plunge it into me, you couldn't hurt me worse. I came because I am going to leave this neighbourhood, and at my age a three-mile distance is an inscrutable obstacle; and I felt a yearning to see you before I left Voysey-street."

"I can't understand why you should wish to see me," said Flora. The butler brought the lamp at this moment, and placed it on the table, illuminating Mrs. Gurner's time-worn visage, which was turned towards Flora with a piteous deprecating look. "Nor can I understand why you should come to me with a falsehood, and announce yourself as a relation."

"Suppose I were to tell you that there was no falsehood at all in that statement, Mrs. Ollivant. Suppose I were to tell you that four years ago, when I first heard of you living with your papa in Fitzroy-square, I knew you were my own blood-relation—my own granddaughter—as near to me as our Loo is—my dead daughter's only child—and yet kept myself aloof from you, and wouldn't come anigh you, or seek to benefit by your father's wealth to the extent of a sixpence, for fear I should bring trouble and shame upon you. Perhaps you would think better of me, and feel a little more kindly towards me, if you knew that."

"Is this true?" gasped Flora.

"Gospel truth, every word of it. When I came to see you at Kensington, and spoke to you of my daughter that went to Australia and married, and died young, leaving an only child, a girl—just such a one as you, perhaps—it was of your own blessed mother I spoke, though I couldn't put it clearer. It was my daughter, Mary Gurner, that your father married, though she changed her name when she went across the sea, on account of family troubles at home; bitter disgrace that came upon her poor foolish father, through embezzling his employer's money to lay it on one of those sinful racehorses, which are always

leading men to destruction; and if there was an act of Parliament passed to have them all exterminated it would be a blessing for wives and families. My husband, James Gurner, was as fine a man as you could see in a day's walk, but racehorses and horsey companions were the ruin of him; and one miserable morning I saw him led away from his own breakfast-table, with handcuffs under his coat-sleeves. There was no Portland or Dartmoor in those days, so my James was sent over the water to Van Diemen's Land, where they took him to a dreadful place called Tasman's Peninsula, a bit of land hanging on to the world by a thread as you may say, and with the sea all raging and roaring round it, and sharks playing about in the surf, and a chain of savage dogs to guard the poor misguided creatures that were sent there. And there they dressed my poor James in gray and yellow, and called him a canary bird; which the disgrace of it and the poor diet broke his heart, and he went off with congestion of the lungs in the second year of his time. Mary was passionately fond of her father; so she went out to Van Diemen's Land after him, and took any situation she could get there, so as to be near him, and to see him now and then, when the rules and regulations permitted."

"And she was my mother!" murmured Flora wonderingly.

It seemed a hard thing to have this ignominy cast upon her all at once; to know that her maternal grandfather had been a convict, that her maternal grandmother was a person whose relationship she must needs blush to own. The only comforting part of the story was that which concerned her mother. It was some consolation to know that she had been tender and devoted, unselfish and faithful.

"My poor mother!" she repeated; "she went out alone to that strange country to be near her wretched father?"

"Yes, she was with him when he died; and then she left Van Diemen's Land and went as nursery governess in a family that travelled from one place to another, unsettled like, till they took up their residence at Hobart Town; and a year or two afterwards your father saw her, and fell in love with her, and married her off-hand. She wrote to tell me how happy she was, and she sent me money very often; but she implored me never to let her husband know that she was the daughter of a felon. 'It wouldn't turn him against me,' she said, 'he's too true for that; but it would grieve him to the heart; it might break his heart to know that his child was descended from a convict.' So I made a solemn promise that I would never hold any communication except with her, and never intrude myself on her married life when she came home to England; little thinking that she was to be taken away so soon, and that I was to lose all

the help and comfort that she had been to me. But I kept my promise, and never came near you or your father, or put forward a claim to your notice, though I knew you were living two or three streets off, rolling in riches."

"It was very good of you," said Flora gently. "I would gladly have given you any assistance in my power; indeed it would have been only a duty, had I known your claim upon me. Anything I can do for you now——"

"No, no," cried Mrs. Gurner eagerly; "don't think that; pray don't think that! I didn't come here for what I could get. I hadn't a mercenary thought. The little that I want for the few years I have to live my son Jarred is pretty safe to provide, thanks to Mr. Leyburne, who allows him a handsome income; and I believe he means to turn over a new leaf, and not squander it on horse-racing, as he has done, which things have been looking brighter for us this last few weeks than they have for a long time. No, my pretty love, I didn't come here to ask for anything; I only came for one look at your sweet face, so like poor Mary's. I should never have let out about the relationship, perhaps, if it hadn't been for your man-servant, with his high and mighty airs; throwing out that I was a beggar, and as good as shutting the door in my face. That was too much for my feelings, as a lady, and I blurted out the truth, just to let him know that he was talking to his betters."

"I am very glad you have told me the truth," said Flora gravely. "I was foolishly proud when I thought myself superior to your granddaughter. It is only right that I should be humiliated. Do not suppose that I am ashamed of my dear mother," she added hastily; "I honour her memory for her devotion and her love. But—but—you can understand that it wounds me a little to know that my grandfather was a felon."

"I didn't ought to have told you," exclaimed Mrs. Gurner, conscience-stricken, "but I couldn't resist it, when you spoke so unkindly just now, knowing how I'd sacrificed my own feelings and my own interest to keep my promise to your mother."

"Forgive me," said Flora humbly; "I am too unhappy to be kind."

And then it occurred to her that she was called upon to make some demonstration of affection—perhaps to kiss this newly-discovered grandmother—and she felt that she could not. Money she could give, or kindness; but affection was not forthcoming at so short a notice.

"Let me help you in some way," she said. "I shall be very glad if I can be of any use to you. I have plenty of money always at my disposal. You need never want for anything that I can give."

"God bless you, my lamb!" sobbed Mrs. Gurner; "you're your mother all over. I won't pretend that a five-pound note, once in a way, wouldn't be a godsend; for even if Jarred does keep things straight for the future, it would be a comfort to me to know that I had a pound or two of my own laid by. And if you will let me come and see you now and then—say once in six weeks, for instance—and sit and talk of your poor mother for half an hour or so, it would do me a world of good."

"Come as often as you like, by-and-by," said Flora, "if my husband recovers. But I fear he is dying."

"My blessed love, while there's life there's hope."

"That is what the doctors tell me. He has lingered longer than they expected, but there is no sign of recovery yet, and the hope seems so faint."

CHAPTER XL.

"Elle aimait, elle aimait comme aiment les courtisanes et les anges, avec orgueil, avec humilité."

WHILE Flora watched and waited beside the bed where her husband lay, life trembling in the balance, life at odds with death which should prevail, doctors doubtful, and discoursing only in vaguest oracles, nurses fain to admit that they had rarely seen a patient brought lower, even when the last awful damps of swift-coming mortality stole over the ashen face, indicative of inevitable doom—while Flora spent her days and nights in passionate bursts of tearful prayer, or intervals of silent hopelessness, that other fair young wife, Louisa Leyburne, knew only the gladness and beauty of life; wandering from one fair scene to another, from lake to mountain, from wild seashore to verdant inland valley, unspeakably happy with that one companion who was to her mind an epitome of all that is noblest and brightest in mankind. Perhaps there is no condition of the human mind which comes nearer perfect happiness

than that of the fetish-worshipper—the man or woman whose life is governed by a master-passion, whose thoughts and desires all tend to one fixed centre, whose aspirations follow one ever-shining star—and of all such idolators the wife who adores her husband is the happiest. Life for her is as ecstatic as that one mystic night-watch in the sanctuary when the deluded Indian girl believes she holds communion with her god. She is no less blind in her devotion, no less exalted in her surrender of self, merged in an imagined divinity. In three years of wedded life it had never occurred to Louisa that this genius who had made her his handmaiden was after all of the same clay as his fellow-men; moulded like them out of various weaknesses; like them prone to err. To her he seemed simply perfect. To suppose that Raffaele had been a better painter, or Rubens a more useful member of society, than Walter Leyburne would have been rank blasphemy in the opinion of his wife. The world would think so, of course, for some time to come, both Raffaele and Rubens having been more fortunate in their surroundings and opportunities; but for her, who knew him, to set earth's grandest genius above him would have been impossible.

"I know what you *can* do, Walter, when once you make up your mind to work honestly," she would say to him sometimes, with a superb air of conviction, "and I long for the day when you will really begin your career."

"My love, let us make the most of our honeymoon," the young husband had answered gaily.

But the honeymoon had now lasted three years—three years of the brightest, easiest, most unconventional life possible to two happy lovers—and Louisa declared that it was time for her husband to set to work. He had not been altogether wasting his days during that sunny idlesse in fair foreign lands. His studies and sketches would have loaded a Pickford van. He had exhibited a genre picture here and there: in Brussels, where Madou himself had complimented the young Englishman; in Milan; in Paris, where the critics had been for the most part favourable to the nameless stranger. The pictures were the simplest of compositions, but showed power. Loo reading a letter in a sunlit garden; Loo playing with her baby in the firelight; Loo looking dreamily across the moonlit waves; always Loo; that most patient and devoted of models was never weary.

Utterly serene had been those three years of wedded life to the idol himself. It is astonishing how slow the human fetish is to tire of incense or worship. Walter accepted his wife's adoration with a charming equanimity; sunned himself in her

admiring smiles; felt that he must really possess some latent element of greatness, or so sensible a woman could not think so much of him. Not for one instant, not with one passing thought, transient as summer lightning, had he ever regretted his unequal marriage. Loo suited him to perfection, amused him, interested him, astonished him by the development of an ever-widening mind. He felt as Pygmalion the sculptor might have felt if his animated statue had been a clever woman instead of a nonentity. He would sit in a half-dreamy idleness and wonder at Loo's cleverness, and say to himself, "This is my work. If she had never loved me, this peerless gem might still have been fetching beer and sweeping floors in Voysey-street." He had no foolish shame in the remembrance that she had once been doomed to base drudgery. He was proud of her emancipation, proud of that instinct of his which had discerned the jewel on the dunghheap.

One day, when Loo had been reproaching him tenderly for his desultory work, his indifference to renown, he put his arm round her and drew her to the cheval-glass.

"Look there, Loo," he said; "that is the one picture I am proud of. Work as hard as I may, I shall never beat that."

No, it was not possible to be happier than these two were, for they had the exquisite delight of looking back to days when the future, now so fair, was clouded and gloomy; and one of them, at least, felt like a captive who had escaped from prison; nay, almost like a soul released from its clay, and translated to a more ethereal world than this common earth.

"Sometimes I almost fancy my life with you must be one long delicious dream," Loo said to her husband. "It is bright enough and wonderful enough for that."

And now, having scampered through Scotland, and explored Ireland, from the Giant's Causeway to the cliffs of Moher, Mr. and Mrs. Leyburne went back to London, and there was serious talk between them of beginning a steady-going, hard-working life in one of those pretty houses in that South-Kensington district where painters love to congregate.

For Loo had talked her husband into the belief that the time had now come for him to begin his career. The praises won by that last little picture of his were enough to fire ambition in a duller breast than Walter Leyburne's. He had needed just so much recognition of his genius as a stimulus to exertion. His love of art had always kept his pencil busy, and he had been improving himself unconsciously during the last three years; but this taste of absolute success inspired him with new earnestness. He was more at ease too, after that meeting with Flora; for the knowledge that he had acted meanly to Mark Cham-

ney's daughter had been the one drop of bitter in his honeyed cup. A natural aversion from all mental effort, a sybaritish shrinking from an unpleasant duty, had kept him from any attempt at explanation, after he had returned, as one resuscitated from death, to the realities and obligations of life. Flora was married and happy, he had said to himself. What could it matter to her whether he were living or dead? And as for Dr. Ollivant—who might possibly have some scruples of conscience on account of that struggle on the Devonian cliff—it behoved him to suffer a little for that outbreak of evil passion, more especially as he had won the object of his heart's desire in Flora Chamney. And thus time had slipped by, and Walter Leyburne had made no sign; and it was only when he was brought face to face with the consequences of his conduct in that interview with Flora, when he saw her lifeless at his feet, and heard how she had suffered for his sake, that he realised the extent of that sin of omission of which he had been guilty. He would have given much to atone for his wrong-doing, but there had been a tone in Flora's farewell that forbade all hope of friendship in the future; and then he and Dr. Ollivant had never got on very well together; there had been always a mute antagonism, a lurking jealousy.

“*‘Lass das Vergangne vergangen seyn!’ ‘Let what is broken so remain!’*” said Mr. Leyburne with a sigh.

The painter and his wife came to London a few days after the migration from Voysey-street; and while Walter dined with some art-friends at an artists'-club, Loo drove over to Camberwell, and spent the evening with Jarred and Mrs. Gurner in their new abode, which had just now all the charm of novelty, so that its very defects were extolled as beauties. Even Louisa was pleased with the queer little cottage on the bank of the canal. It was pleasantly secluded, and altogether an agreeable change from the publicity of Voysey-street, where on summer evenings the inhabitants seemed to live chiefly on their doorsteps; women standing in little groups, gossiping, with portentous countenances, as if their talk were of the fate of nations; children squatting on the shallow steps, or swarming on the scrapers. There was the privacy of a home in this sheltered little garden, and this old-fashioned cottage with its windows opening on the grass-plot, its humble aspirations towards the beautiful, in the way of an ornamental gable or two and a fanciful chimney-pot.

It was a strange thing for Loo to sit in the little parlour, drinking tea in state, and suffering herself to be admired by her delighted relatives, as if she had been a princess of the blood-royal receiving the homage of her subjects. Mrs. Gur-

ner contemplated her granddaughter with a rapture that was almost religious in its fervour; handled the material of Louisa's dress, speculated upon its cost per yard, expatiated on the beauty of the Maltese lace, which Loo wore with a royal carelessness.

"And I suppose your maid comes in for all your cast-off dresses," remarked Mrs. Gurner with a sigh, "and will dispose of that lace to some one in the wardrobe business for a mere song?"

"I am not quite so extravagant as to throw real lace aside, grandma," replied Loo; "but my maid certainly has the reversion of my dresses. You see, I could not think of offering a dress I had worn to you; but if you really admire this gray silk——"

"Admire it, Louisa!" ejaculated the elderly lady; "I never saw a lovelier dress, or one that more bespeaks the lady; and when you have worn it as long as you can wear it, made a hack of it even, it would turn and do up lovely for me, and plenty to spare for turnings, you being so much taller."

"Then you shall have it, grandma, and I promise not to hack it. But I should like to wear it a little longer, as it is a favourite dress of Walter's," added Loo, with a blush, as if she had been speaking of a lover rather than a husband.

"Do you remember that heavenly maroon silk he gave you when you were sitting to him for Laminia?" asked Mrs. Gurner.

"Remember it? yes, indeed, grandma," answered Loo, with a sudden troubled look and a faint sigh.

She remembered that Sunday morning at the Kensington boarding-school when Miss Tompion had been outraged by the appearance of the ruby silk, and had said hard things about it. She remembered kneeling on the bare boards of the wardrobe-room at Thurlow House, raining bitter tears upon that "wine-dark" dress—angry, humiliated, almost despairing.

To how fair a morning had she travelled through that dark night of her life!

She had brought a well-filled purse to Malvina Cottage; and presently, when she had gratified Mrs. Gurner by inspecting every nook and corner, from the servant's bedchamber—a mere box of a room, squeezed into the would-be Swiss roof—to the wash-house and yard, where Jarred contemplated keeping poultry by-and-by, when they were settled—Louisa presented her grandmother with a handsome sum of money to buy a little new furniture.

"And, grandma dear," she added pleadingly, "you would so much oblige me by not buying it second-hand. We had so

much of second-hand things in Voysey-street, that I have grown up with a dislike to them. I should like to see that pretty little parlour down-stairs, and your bedroom, and father's, furnished with bright-looking new things, fresh and clean, if they were only varnished deal, and chosen expressly for you; not other people's discarded furniture."

"My dear, there is nothing to beat a broker's-shop if you want bargains, and know how to buy," answered Mrs. Gurner sententiously. "But after such generosity as you have shown me, it would be a hard thing if I didn't defer to your opinion. The goods shall be bought new and *in sweet*."

After this, and when the stars were shining over the house-tops of Camberwell, Loo and her father walked alone in the little garden, and talked together with unrestrained affection.

Jarred told his daughter that for her sake, because she was so bright a creature, and had achieved so fair a destiny, he meant to try his hardest to be a somewhat better man in the future. She kissed him tenderly, too deeply moved for many words, and only answered:

"And for the right's sake, dear father; for the satisfaction of your own conscience."

"Ah, my dear, I contrived to rub on so many years without being troubled by my conscience. If ever I did feel an uncomfortable sense that my life was all askew, the feeling wore off after a glass of gin-and-water. But now that I am getting older and see you a lady, and the wife of a rich man—well, I do feel that I should like to place myself on the square, and that there are many little things I used to do in Voysey-street, which were not up to the mark, not quite in accordance with your rigid moralist's notion of a gentleman's conduct. And I mean to reform that altogether in future, Loo, and to live quietly in my retired little box, and restore pictures and manipulate violins, and earn my living like a man. Of course, for the old lady's sake, my life and health being uncertain, I shall not refuse the three hundred per annum which your husband is liberal enough to allow us."

"Of course not, father," replied Loo warmly. Utopian generosity in Mr. Gurner would have alarmed her, as too unnatural a burst of virtue. "Of course not. And I shall be able to help you, too, out of my pocket-money; for Walter gives me more than I could spend if I were ever so extravagant."

Louisa's carriage—only a hired brougham yet awhile—was at the door, and she was just ready to say "Good-bye," when Mrs. Gurner indulged in a little gush of that melancholy which was her normal condition, and from which she only emerged upon rare and exceptional occasions of rejoicing.

"Ah, Loo, you are a happy woman, and have reason to be thankful! The poor thing that your husband used to talk about when he was painting his Laminia has had a hard time of it lately."

Loo looked puzzled.

"Do you mean Miss Chamney, grandma—Mrs. Ollivant, at least?"

"I do, my dear. Dr. Ollivant is lying dangerously ill—at death's door."

"Where did you hear that, mother?" asked Jarred sharply.

"In Voysey-street, promiscuously; just before we left."

"Who should be talking of Dr. Ollivant in Voysey-street?" demanded Jarred wonderingly.

"I can't exactly call to mind who it was told me," replied Mrs. Gurner innocently, "but I think it must have been some one who had heard one of the medical students from the Middlesex talking of him. There's a many of 'em that take their sandwich and glass of ale at the King's Head between one and two."

"Ah, very likely," answered Jarred, with a troubled look. "So Dr. Ollivant has been ill, has he? Did you hear what was the matter?"

"I think they said it was toyphide fever."

"Poor girl!" said Loo, thinking of the young wife—the woman whom she, Loo, had robbed of her first lover. It was a hard thing that she should be desolate and despairing while her happier rival's horizon was so bright and clear.

"But I had my hour of gloom and fear," thought Loo, recalling those slow summer days at Liddlecomb, when her lover lay steeped in the night of unconsciousness, and none could tell how swiftly or how soon he might pass into the deeper darkness of death.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Once, as methought, Fortune me kiss'd,
 And bade me ask what I thought best,
 And I should have it as me list,
 Therewith to set my heart in rest.
 I ask'd but for my lad's heart,
 To have for evermore mine own;
 Then at an end were all my smart;
 Then should I need no more to moan."

BITTER were those autumn days in Dr. Ollivant's sick chamber; bitter and slow to pass; each several hour prolonged by pain of body and weariness of spirit. The patient had been brought to just that point of prostration in which it would have seemed to the unconcerned humanitarian, looking at the case from a common-sense standpoint, a mercy to let him slip away into the untroubled region of death; a mercy to loose the tired soul from that corpse-like clay, which had no sense save sense of pain. And perhaps, in these sad days, Flora's worst agony was to see the torture inflicted upon the wearied sufferer by those ever-changing medicaments which the doctors prescribed; blistering, poulticing, fomenting that feeble body; administering drugs which seemed to have no effect beyond the annoyance they inflicted upon the patient; assailing him, hour after hour, as he lay there moaning out feebly that he wanted only to be left alone.

Never once in that awful period of suspense did Mrs. Ollivant reproach her daughter-in-law by so much as one word. But there were looks the agonised mother could not forbear; looks of infinite pathos, which said plain as plainest words, "Why did you let this come to pass? Why, if you loved him so well, did you abandon him to such desolation?"

For nearly three weeks Flora watched beside her husband's bed; sitting for hours with his burning hand held in hers; motionless as marble; breathing restrainedly, lest a too audible breath should pierce the filmy veil which divided his troubled sleep from waking. And during all that time the sick man was for the most part unconscious of her presence, indifferent whose hand held his own, whose gentle touch smoothed his pillow or laid lotion-steeped linen on his burning forehead. There had been rare flashes of sense in the midst of delirium—moments in which Cuthbert Ollivant had recognised his wife, and called her by her name; but memory was for the time extinguished.

He accepted her presence as a natural thing—knew not that they had ever been parted.

Thus the burden of life went on growing daily heavier, as it seemed to Flora, for three weeks, and then one night—one never-to-be-forgotten night—when she had been praying fervently for hours at a stretch alone in the dressing-room adjoining the sick chamber, where she was supposed to be taking her rest upon the sofa, while Mrs. Ollivant and the night-nurse kept watch—just at that awful hour betwixt night and morning, when the destroying angel is said to be busiest, the change came; and it was a change for the better.

Cuthbert Ollivant awoke from a lethargic slumber, and looked at his mother, with a clearer look in the heavy eyes than she had seen there for a long time. He asked for some drink—wine—anything. The nurse brought him a glass of champagne and soda-water, the only form of nourishment which he had taken for days past, and even this had been taken most reluctantly. To-night he drained the glass with avidity.

"That was good," he said; and then looking about, he asked, "Where is Flora?"

"I have made her lie down, dear. She has been watching by your bed so long; she has been so patient and devoted."

Something told the mother that no speech could be so welcome to her son as praise of that idolised wife.

"Yes; poor child, poor child! I have been ill a long time—so long. That medicine Bayne gave me last is no use. Chlorate—hy—hydrochlorate. I am a little better to night"—feeling his pulse—"feeble, very feeble, but not so quick."

He turned upon his pillow, assisted by the tearful mother, and dropped asleep again. Flora was standing in the doorway between the two rooms watching.

What did this change mean? Both women asked themselves that question. Was it only the prelude of the end, the last flicker, the final rally of expiring nature? They could only wonder, and wait, and pray.

It was not the end. From that hour Dr. Ollivant's condition improved. Very slow, very tedious, and beyond measure wearisome to the patient was the process of recovery, the slow return of strength, the long interval during which the slightest exertion was a painful labour. But through all Cuthbert Ollivant was happy, for now, for the first time in his life, he was very sure that his wife loved him.

As soon as he was able to be moved, she went with him to Ventnor alone; the patient mother contented to resume her quiet post in the background of her son's life, now that he had his idol again.

They occupied a villa near the sea, and some distance from the town; a solitary villa, from which they looked out upon the green hills and the blue water, and could fancy themselves alone upon some enchanted isle, fair as the romantic land of Prospero and Miranda. Here, as strength gradually returned, and recovered health became a certainty, Dr. Ollivant and his wife were utterly happy. This was better than their honeymoon, Cuthbert would say sometimes, with the serenest smile that his wife had ever seen upon his face.

She had told him all about that meeting with Walter Leyburne at Muckcross, as soon he was strong enough to bear any talk upon agitating subjects. She had told him how her heart had yearned for him through all that time of severance; how, her first passion past, there had been no such thing as hatred or scorn in her mind; only bitterest regret that he, whom she had held so noble, should have stooped to deceive.

"And then Heaven had mercy upon my blindness, and I learned that you were free from the burden of Walter's death. God had spared you that misery, while chastising you for your weak yielding to temptation, and punishing me for my ingratitude to you."

"My love, it was not ingratitude," he answered; "it was but the natural revulsion of a truthful and noble mind, intolerant of untruthfulness."

Flora told her husband also of that interview with Mrs. Gurner; confessing with deepest humility the taint upon her maternal ancestry.

"Are you not ashamed of your wife, Cuthbert, now that you know she is the granddaughter of a felon?"

"My dearest love, in the first place, I should be indisposed to believe this Mrs. Gurner without confirmatory evidence; and in the second, I should love you just as fondly, honour you just as much, if your maternal grandfather had been Thurtell the murderer, or Fauntleroy the fraudulent banker."

"So you see, dearest," said the doctor, one day, when he had been speaking of his great happiness, "Providence has been kind to a sinner who deemed the world well lost for love."

THE END.

LOST FOR LOVE

A Novel

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," &c.

The following Opinions of the Press are taken, almost indiscriminately, from the criticisms of Newspapers all over the Kingdom:—

"The conspicuous improvement in the style and matter of Miss Braddon's later novels is particularly noticeable in this her latest work. She is far more unaffected in 'Lost for Love' than in any of her previous volumes. Although ostensibly a sensational story, this element is not too obtrusive, and the interest of the tale is well sustained. There is not much to be said concerning the plot. It is what may now be essentially called 'Miss Braddon's plot,' constructed mathematically, and with undeviating adherence to the rules she has laid down for herself. In common with the majority of this author's plots, it is well put together, the mere mechanism of the book being only such as could have been constructed by a practised hand. The story is interesting, and the pictures of the existence of the hard-working Londoners in low life are given with much fidelity. As a rule, there are two phases of existence invariably burlesqued

by the author who would portray them—viz. Irish life and Bohemianism. The Irishman of fiction seldom lives out of the realms of fancy, and the Bohemian is generally equally overdrawn. Miss Braddon's rendering of Loo Gurner, of Voysey-street, a girl belonging to the latter class, is the best piece of character-painting in the book. Loo is a thorough Bohemian, handsome, warm-hearted, and clever; she is a credit to the head and heart of her creator. From first to last, she is the most consistent character of the tale. Keen knowledge of human nature in its most subtle and unobtrusive phases is discernible in this portrait. Her womanlike admiration for her worthless father, the little episode of the blue gown, and her gradual awakening to a sense of the value of the niceties of life when the artist, Walter Leyburne, visits them, are amongst the most natural touches in the book. The author's sense of humour crops up in her description of Miss Tompion's seminary, where the unlucky Loo is placed by the painter, who chivalrously takes her under his protection. There is no burlesque in the droll way in which the schoolgirl cliques are described; the toadyism, the jealousies, and the second-rate stateliness of Miss Tompion herself are irresistibly comic and perfectly natural. Not less interesting and graphic is the account of the emigration office, and the emigrant ship to which Loo fled in disgust with the grim formalities of the 'Young Ladies' Seminary.' Next in order as a clever word-portrait comes Mrs. Gurner, Loo's grandmother, and the keeper of a 'ladies' second-hand wardrobe.' The old woman's character is perfect of its kind. Her good nature, her vulgarity, and her genteel reminiscences are in admirable keeping throughout, and again show Miss Braddon's power of painting the humorous side of human nature. Mrs. Gurner has a firmly-fixed hallucination that her business is an eminently respectable one; this delusion being founded upon the fact that in her wareroom there is neither counter, nor scales, nor weights, nor any other object hurtful to the feelings. Contrary to what might have been expected, the 'fast,' slangy, sensational female, popularly believed to be Miss Braddon's ideal woman, is not to be found in these pages. The women are all good types of their sex, and are naturally drawn, the two girl heroines especially. They are well contrasted, and neither loses by the contrast.

Flora Chamney, fair, gentle, and rather weak-minded, is an admirable foil to show off the physical beauty and original mind of poor poverty-stricken Loo. Both girls love the handsome painter, who plays fast and loose with both in a remarkably lifelike manner.

The tale is bright and interesting, and there is not a line of it to which the most rigid purist can take exception."—*Morning Post*, Oct. 10, 1874.

"Nothing can be more simple and unpretending than the beginning of the story. We are introduced to a dull, sombre, highly-respectable house in Wimpole-street—a doctor's house, of course. Dr. Ollivant, the occupant, has, at thirty-six years of age, acquired a great practice by sheer hard work and exclusive devotion to his profession. He had resolved as a lad to be successful, and his life has been given up unreservedly to this single object. He is cold in manner, has 'dark, solemn eyes,' and 'premature gravity hung upon him as a garment.' Although a fashionable physician, he lives secluded with his mother, who keeps house for him. After a laborious day, he dines with the old lady, and then shuts himself up in his study with his books. It is easy to understand what is going to happen when this solemn personage is suddenly brought into contact with a pretty, bright young girl, full of vivacity and sunshine. He is first amused, then interested, and, before he knows it, over head and ears in love. Mr. Chamney, the young lady's father, is suffering from heart-disease, and wishes to see his daughter provided for in case of his death. He proposes to make Dr. Ollivant her guardian, and also favours the addresses of a young artist, Walter Leyburne, in whom he is interested. Leyburne presents the necessary contrast to the doctor's 'dark, solemn eyes' and premature gravity. He is 'a bright-looking young fellow, with an expression as radiant as a summer morning, blue eyes, straight Greek nose, light auburn moustache, with drooping ends sedulously twisted, only half concealing a somewhat feminine mouth, auburn hair, worn long in Raffaele

fashion;' and he has a handsome fortune, left him by an old uncle, to back his artistic aspirations. This situation, though perhaps not particularly novel, is portrayed with a good deal of cleverness, and, what is more remarkable in Miss Braddon, with self-restraint. She is content to work with quiet simple touches, and the characters, though rather slight and shadowy, are interesting. We feel as if we had got safe beyond the sphere of paroxysmal passion and sensational incident, and prepare ourselves for the enjoyment of a domestic idyl. Of course the doctor is jealous of his rival, but he suppresses his feelings, and even assents with becoming resignation when the marriage is finally arranged. An experienced student of fiction instinctively knows what to expect when he finds papa ready with his blessing in the early part of a story. Another figure is now added to the scene. This is Loo Gurner, a character upon whom the author has evidently bestowed a good deal of pains. Loo's father is a professor of the art of doctoring pictures and violins for the Wardour-street market, and Leyburne, who, as an artist, might be supposed to know better, has somehow dealings with him, and is fond of going to his dingy manufactory to vapour about art. Here he meets Loo, is struck by her wild neglected beauty, and resolves to make her the subject of a great picture, to be called 'Lamia;' and the acquaintance thus begun quickly ripens into a dangerous intimacy. Leyburne is not only fascinated by the 'dark, grand eyes, the ivory paleness of cheek and brow, the full crimson lips with their perfect curve, the loose shadowy hair,' but he undertakes to 'redeem the imprisoned soul from bondage,' in other words, to teach Loo to appreciate the beauties of Keats, Shakespeare, Byron, and even Æschylus. We must confess that when we got to the grand, dark eyes and full crimson lips, we began to fear that we were getting back to some of the familiar delicacies of Miss Braddon's early style. It should be understood, however, that this novel is conducted on principles of the strictest propriety, and that Walter and Loo are equally unconscious of the perilous entanglement into which they are straying. One night, on their return from a rather late excursion, Walter finds his companion thrown on his hands by her father, who refuses to have anything more to

do with her; and it must be admitted that this is rather an awkward situation for a young gentleman who is already almost engaged to another young lady. Walter behaves in the most honourable way, sends Loo to a respectable boarding-school, and then—which is not perhaps quite so honourable—goes down to Flora at the seaside, and at a hint from her father proposes marriage, and is accepted. Nemesis follows him in the shape of old Jarred, who accuses him of carrying off his daughter, and demands that she should be given up. Dr. Ollivant happens to overhear the conversation, challenges Walter with his perfidy to Flora, and threatens to expose him. Words come to blows, and all at once, without expecting it, we are in for the great sensation incident of the drama—the tremendous header that brings down the gods: ‘The doctor wrestled, the painter made free use of his fists. For some moments Walter had the best of it, till, feeling himself losing ground, the doctor called science to his aid, and planted a blow on his antagonist’s temple which sent Walter reeling backwards, helpless and unconscious. Reeling backwards on the sunburnt slippery sward that edged the cliff—backwards until, with a wild cry of horror, the doctor saw him sink below the verge.’ When we reached this point we felt that we had indeed been made the victim of misplaced confidence. The quiet and sobriety of the earlier chapters were only the torrent’s smoothness ere it dashed below. There is a rough vigour in the tale which distinguishes it from the ordinary insipidity of current fiction.”

—*Saturday Review*, Oct. 3, 1874.

“No one would be prepared to say off-hand how many novels Miss Braddon has written since ‘Lady Audley’s Secret’ appeared; but any one who had read them all and took up ‘Lost for Love’ would be prepared to say, and justified in saying, that it has a place entirely its own in the long list of books of which it is the latest. Several of its predecessors have shown Miss Braddon’s power of dealing with human passions, and the graceful facility with which she could describe incidents. But

'Lost for Love,' while it exhibits no falling-off in these respects, shows a subduedness of tone and an amount of quiet force which is not to be seen in most of the other novels from the same hand. By those who will give some attention to the story, it will be seen that the author has shown new powers in the delineation of character, while she has polished up that power of describing passion and suffering which she has always exhibited. Indeed, though it would be impossible to say that Miss Braddon has in 'Lost for Love' shown in everything the highest attributes of the novelist's art, there can be no hesitation in saying that the novel will take a very high place among the fictional literature of the period. The novel may be shortly described as one of incident and careful character-study. . Old Mrs. Gurner is charming. Dickens never drew more faithfully a type of London character; indeed, his tendency to exaggeration prevented him from ever drawing one so absolutely faithful. All about Voysey-street in the novel is capital. Nothing but a close and attentive study of London lower-middle-class life could have produced such a sketch as this—and study alone could not have done it without the power to understand what was observed. 'Lost for Love' must be placed high among Miss Braddon's novels. It has few of the faults that have marked several of her stories, and it has a quiet power which makes it attractive to a high degree."—*Scotsman*, Sept. 25, 1874.

"Miss Braddon's new story, 'Lost for Love,' seems to our judgment one of the best specimens of its class. If we must admit that there are a few persons in the creation to whom it may happen to be 'lost for love,' or rather to be lost *in* love—completely carried away by the tide, at least during a part of their lives—here is a very fine exhibition of the singular phenomenon. . We must pronounce 'Lost for Love' one of the best novels lately produced. It is not at all 'sensational' in the bad sense, though it is, like others by Miss Braddon, sufficiently exciting. There is no crime or low vice, or any approach

to either; nor the slightest impropriety of a certain kind either in description or suggestion. In several important respects, it appears to us, Miss Braddon's recent works deserve the highest commendation. They display, as here in the characters of Flora and Ollivant, a sound and consistent notion of what is excellent in womanhood and in manhood. The action of the characters upon each other, in their growing influence and gradually-changing relations, is shown with a subtle discernment only surpassed by George Eliot. All the persons of the story are thoroughly alive and awake, and, when in each other's presence, they compel us to look at what they do and to listen to what they say. To these very great merits in a novelist Miss Braddon adds that of much knowledge of the world. She has a humorous acquaintance with that lower-middle-class world of London, the world of queer untidy muddle and shifty hand-to-mouth poverty seen in Voysey-street, Fitzroy-square. Dickens has hardly bequeathed us any representation of this kind more truthful than is the squalid household of the knavish picture-cleaner and violin-mender, who fabricates rare originals for rich amateurs to buy, with his mother, the dealer in ladies' cast-off finery, and his daughter, the brave, honest 'Loo.' Every detail of their way of living, of talking, and of thinking is touched off with admirable skill. There is much reality in the behaviour of Jarred at the skittle-alley and at Hampton races, when he would slake his idle spleen with gin-and-water, and so works himself up to a desperate effort. But the passages in which Louisa runs away from the genteel Kensington boarding-school, and gets on board the emigrant-ship for Australia, are as good as anything in the book. Upon the whole, we have great pleasure in recommending 'Lost for Love' as better worth reading than any of some threescore unmentioned novels which were generally alluded to at the beginning of this review."

—*Illustrated London News*, Oct. 3, 1874.

"Miss Braddon's new novel, 'Lost for Love,' is replete with that freshness, vigour, and originality which distinguished her earliest productions, and which entitled her to a niche by the

side of the greatest writers of fiction of our day. Within a few years two styles of novels have appeared : one, of the sensational school, in which the incidents appear to have been borrowed from the *Newgate Calendar* ; the other of so fast a nature, that it may well be termed the George Sand School. Now, in ‘*Lost for Love*,’ though the interest never flags for a moment, there is nothing revolting, nothing that would cause the faintest blush on a maiden’s cheek ; and this shows a master hand. Shakespeare, in *Romeo and Juliet*, introduces three street murders, one case of poison, and another of stabbing, but so felicitously is the story told that the feelings of the audience are not shocked ; and whenever Miss Braddon presents the reader with some startling incident, an incident which, to adopt a common but very anti-anatomical expression, ‘brings your heart into your mouth,’ everything that would otherwise be revolting is happily toned down by the skill of the writer. The death scene is told to perfection, and, though truly exciting, is touching in the extreme. Jarred Gurner, the violin and picture votary, is a perfectly original character, and one that Charles Dickens might have been proud of ; his mother, the proprietress of the ladies’ wardrobe establishment, is most graphically depicted. Loo Gurner absorbs a large amount of interest ; Flora is a most lovable creature, as unlike the usual stereotyped heroine of novel as the fountains at Versailles are to those of Trafalgar-square ; whilst the modern Alexander, who loses all for love, carries the reader with him despite his shortcomings. The plot is deeply interesting ; the characters are well drawn ; the language is at once tender, pathetic, bright, and sparkling ; the story is so admirably constructed, and so well told, that we have nothing but words of praise to offer. We congratulate the authoress of ‘*Lady Audley’s Secret*’ upon a most decided success, and we strongly recommend ‘*Lost for Love*’ to all classes of readers as the book of the season.”—*Court Journal*, Oct. 10, 1874.

“Miss Braddon’s new book is in her later manner. Unaffected, simple, and easily written, it will disappoint her early admirers, and please that which we hope is a wider

public. To leave the plot and turn to the flesh which is placed by Miss Braddon upon the dry bones, we will, without revealing all the details of the story, explain that, when we called 'Lost for Love' simple and unaffected, we did not by any means intend to imply that there was nothing sensational in it. The sensational element is, however, subordinate, and is far from being left in a position of undue prominence in the reader's mind when he closes the book. . . . Miss Braddon's 'Lost for Love' is less likely to be a failure than a success."—*Athenæum*, Sept. 19, 1874.

"It need hardly be said that it would not be easy to find any fresh criticism to offer on a writer who has been so long before the public, and whose merits and demerits have been so fully canvassed as Miss Braddon. Her novels . . . are invariably skilfully put together and readable. . . . It would be a work of supererogation to attempt to give any detailed outline of a story which is pretty sure sooner or later to be in all our readers' hands; it will be enough to say that its moral is to show how a naturally honourable and high-minded man may be led by love into a course altogether inconsistent with honour, uprightness, and good feeling—a doctrine which cannot be said to be preached here for the first time. The situation is very well conceived and described, and there is a certain nobility about the sinner, who, for the sake of his great love, is content to forfeit even his own self-respect, which makes us ready to admit the excuses he could urge for his sin, and to rejoice that he turns out to have been less guilty than he believed. Jarred Gurner, the violin and picture 'restorer' of Voysey-street, Fitzroy-square, is a very good character; and so, too, is his mother, the proprietress of the 'ladies' wardrobe' establishment, an avocation which has commended itself to her mind by reason of its 'gentility,' there being no weights or scales employed, as in mere plebeian trades; whilst the daughter, Loo Gurner, quite bears away the palm in point of interest from Flora Chamney, the nominal heroine. Granting that 'Lost for Love' wants some

of the freshness and vigour which distinguished its author's earliest novels, it yet affords a very favourable specimen of her powers, and we may confidently predict for it a warm welcome from her numerous admirers."—*Graphic*, Oct. 3, 1874.

"Readers who are in the habit of judging Miss Braddon by her earlier works of fiction will find some difficulty in crediting her with the authorship of 'Lost for Love.' The well-defined and ingenious plot of this new story flows smoothly on, marked by few, if any, of those sensational incidents which formed the chief attractions of 'Lady Audley's Secret' and 'Aurora Floyd.' Miss Braddon is to be congratulated on the development of a higher and more refined style. If she is not able, as before, to secure the admiration of the 'groundlings,' she will doubtless find her reward in the praise of the 'judicious.' The pictures of life in Voysey-street are cleverly drawn; Mrs. Gurner, the dealer in ladies' second-hand clothes; her son Jarred Gurner, 'a professor of the art of doctoring pictures and of doctoring violins;' and her granddaughter Loo, who 'helped her grandmother in the business and housework, waited on the lodgers, ran errands, did whatever cleaning may have been done where everything seemed always dirty, and endured not a little reproof of a low-spirited kind, which the girl herself described as "nagging," from her elderly relatives'—being most happily sketched. . . . Miss Braddon deals out strictly poetical justice to all her characters, and brings an admirably-written novel to a highly artistic finish."—*Leeds Mercury*, Sept. 24, 1874.

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